



OKLAHOMA COLLEGE OF OPTOMETRY

April 7, 2025

To: Members of the Minnesota House Health Finance & Policy Committee
Members of the Minnesota Senate Health & Human Services Committee

Dear Members of the Minnesota House Health Finance & Policy Committee and Senate Health & Human Services Committee,

I am writing this letter to you in support of Minnesota optometry, and their efforts towards SF 1144/HF 1011 involving optometric scope modernization specifically including injections, eyelid lesion removal, and certain eyelid procedures. While in optometry school, we received top notch education, both didactically and clinically, in all aspects of optometry including contact lenses, low vision, vision therapy, primary care optometry, ocular disease of the anterior segment (front half of the eye), ocular disease of the posterior segment (back half of the eye), pediatric optometry, systemic disease as it relates to the eyes, injections in and around the eyes, and laser procedures. These injections and office-based procedures are the key reason as to why Minnesota optometry is pushing for scope modernization, with their goal to catch Minnesota up to the level of training that now happens for injections and eyelid procedures for students at all schools and colleges of optometry. As well as catch Minnesota up to the 25 other states that allow optometrists to perform injections and eyelid procedures.

I furthered my education after graduating from Pacific University in 2009, by doing a one-year residency in Oklahoma in 2009-2010. Since Oklahoma has had injections and laser privileges for optometrists for over 30 years, I was able to take my wonderful training at Pacific University and build upon that by doing injections, eyelid procedures, and laser procedures in Oklahoma, specifically eyelid lesion removals, steroid injections for styes, YAG laser capsulotomies, laser peripheral iridotomies (PI's), and selective laser trabeculoplasties (SLT's). In total, I have done, or supervised students and residents doing, well over 5,000 injections, eyelid procedures, and laser procedures in the nearly 16 years that I have been in Oklahoma.

Just like any other aspect of medicine, education and training has evolved in optometry school over the years as technology has evolved and new procedures advanced. Optometry students that went to school in the 2010's no doubt received better injections and laser education and training than optometry students that went to school in the 1980's.

Students that go to optometry school today currently receive training on injections and laser procedures at 4 levels:

1. Didactically in the classroom where students take full courses on injections, eyelid procedures and laser procedures. In those courses, they listen to lectures, watch videos of actual procedures and get to interact with instructors/professors, ask questions and learn.

Nate Lighthizer, O.D., F.A.A.O.

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2. In the laboratory where students get hands-on training with actual lasers, injection techniques and surgical procedures. Model eyes are used that simulate the procedure. Students are doing procedures and training on model eyes in the lab to simulate actual procedures.
3. Students are tested both on the classroom portion via written exams, and the laboratory hands-on portion via practicals/proficiencies where they are observed and graded by a faculty member/professor as they are doing the simulated procedures.
4. Doing live cases and procedures on real life patients under the supervision of attending doctors. This occurs for all of our 4th year optometry students here in Oklahoma where I am a faculty member. Because the current law in Minnesota does not allow optometrists to do injections and laser procedures, students are not able to get this 4th level of training in Minnesota. So if someone tells you “we can’t let the optometrists do these injections and laser procedures because they don’t have the proper training”, the answer is because the law in Minnesota does not allow them to get this final level of training.

So we all probably agree that the training is better in 2025 than it was in 1980. The question could then be reasonably posed “well what if a doctor graduated from optometry school in 1990 and wants to do injections and eyelid procedures now? How do we get them trained?” I would answer that question with this: if an ophthalmologist finished their ophthalmology training in 1990, how did he/she get trained on the anti-VEGF injections which came about after their formal training ended? The answer: they went to a weekend course or a 1-day course where they were trained on how to do these injections. In other words, they built upon their education and training, and when a new procedure came about, they took an hours to days training course and added a new skill to their arsenal. An optometrist that graduated 30+ years ago would be doing the exact same thing.

In conclusion, I am sure you are very proud to represent the citizens of Minnesota as an elected member of the Minnesota House or Senate. It goes without saying that you want what’s best for your constituents. You want the best and brightest optometrists caring for your citizens whether it pertains to laser procedures, infant eye exams, contact lens eye exams, low vision exams, or general eye exams. As a North Dakota boy born and raised, I am a proud upper Midwesterner who spent large amounts of my time in Minnesota growing up. I was the valedictorian of my Pacific University optometry class of 2009, voted top clinician in my class, one of the top 4 residents in my residency class nationwide in regards to national boards scores, and recently was named one of top 250 optometrists in the nation (out of nearly 45,000). I don’t say any of that to brag or pat myself on the back. Frankly, it does not matter. I say it for this reason: I practice in Oklahoma, and not in North Dakota or Minnesota, because the law in Oklahoma allows me to do what I have been trained to do. Minnesota’s current optometry law does not. Passing this law in Minnesota will only help the Minnesota citizens receive top notch care from well qualified optometrists, and also will facilitate Minnesota being a location where the best and the brightest future eye doctors practice.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me anytime.

Sincerely,

 o.d.

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