



Eyes on the Future: Exploring Career Paths in Optometry



EMPLOYED OR INDEPENDENT OPTOMETRIST

Employed Doctor of Optometry

Being an employed optometrist of a larger organization which owns and operates optometry practices, provides the security of a regular salary, and benefits and allows the doctor to concentrate on seeing patients without the complexities of running a business. Full- or part-time employment opportunities are typically offered.

Affiliated (Independent) Doctor of Optometry

An affiliated optometrist is an independent practice owner with a well-known retail brand as their optical fulfillment partner. Affiliated doctors work in collaborative environments where they provide clinical knowledge, in partnership with the retailer's expertise, to provide patients with a complete experience of the highest quality. The retailer typically provides additional support in the form of technology, online scheduling, localized marketing, and online and social media tools to help grow the doctor's patient base.

Becoming an employed/affiliated optometrist has its own set of advantages and disadvantages. Ultimately, your level of success and satisfaction in this role will be influenced by what you prioritize and value in your professional life.

Pros

- Employed/affiliated optometry offers job security due to the stability provided by employment with a larger organization compared to self-employment.
- Optometrists in an employed/affiliated settings often receive a comprehensive benefits package, including health insurance, paid time off, and other perks.
- The structured environment of employed/affiliated optometry may provide a clear expectation of work and a predictable schedule for optometrists.
- There is a potential for higher earning in employed/affiliated optometry, as starting salaries can be competitive and potentially higher than in private practice.

Cons (Challenges)

- One of the disadvantages of employed/affiliated optometry is the reduced level of control that optometrists may have over various aspects of their practice, including equipment, treatments, and products.
- Employed/affiliated optometrists may experience pressure to meet a high patient volume, which can result in a more fast-paced work environment. The emphasis on patient volume may detract from the ability to provide personalized care, as there may be limited time for individualized attention.
- Additionally, employed/affiliated optometrists may have limited opportunities for entrepreneurship, as they do not have the ability to establish their own practice and become independent business owners.



Resources

- **American Association of Corporate Optometrists (AACO)**
<https://www.aacoeyes.org/>

AACO was started in 2013 by a small steering group of Optometrists that served on a Walmart advisory board. They decided to create an organization that is inclusive of all retail brands and includes both practice owners and employed optometrists.



Why choose this path?

My childhood goal was to become a doctor; I just didn't know what kind. Learning about optometry from an article in US News and World Report, I was not aware of this profession. To learn more, I took a position as an optician/optometric tech to work throughout college.

For those who are seeing the world for the first time, to those who have seen the world change over time, optometry has given me the means to impact how people see their world. Almost 3 decades later, I have cared for patients as a corporate optometrist, independent optometrist affiliated with a retail chain, traditional private practice owner, and industry consultant. What impact do you wish to make on the world?

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