



# Roles, responsibilities, and job description of ophthalmic nurses, a universal definition is required

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## Dear Editor

It has been estimated that more than one billion people worldwide live with vision impairment or blindness that may be due to preventable conditions [1]. Therefore, screening and detection of ocular diseases are strategically important.

Ophthalmic nurses may play an essential role in vision care, especially in the prevention and screening of ocular diseases. Allied ophthalmic personnel are at the forefront of eye care services, especially in low-resource settings and rural or remote areas where ophthalmologists [2] and optometrists are scarce.

Several ocular diseases can be screened and diagnosed by well-trained ophthalmic nurse practitioners. These specialized trained nurses may play a significant role in public awareness, diagnosis, or management of ocular conditions [3], or in biomedical research activities. Ophthalmic nurses have taken on extended functions, including intravitreal injection, preoperative cataract evaluations, and management of nurse-led practices to accommodate the burden of eye care services [4]. However, some potentially blinding conditions, including glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, and retinopathy of prematurity, may be diagnosed by ophthalmic nurses, as described herein.

As a potentially blinding condition, glaucoma requires urgent attention. Ophthalmic nurses with proper knowledge and training may achieve a high level of agreement in patient assessment and management of suspected glaucoma [5].

The sensitivity and specificity achieved by nurse practitioners in diagnosing diabetic retinopathy have been reported to be over 90 percent. A very high concordance has been found between the grading of diabetic retinopathy by an ophthalmic nurse and that by an ophthalmologist [6].

Timely screening for retinopathy of prematurity (ROP) is critical, as the disease is potentially blinding in childhood. In an interesting study, researchers found that wide-field digital retinal photography by nurses was reasonable and effective in the diagnosis and referral of ROP [7].

Several studies have shown the importance of training allied healthcare personnel. Overall, training community healthcare workers and establishing guidelines are effective in the prevention and management of non-communicable diseases [8]. As such, ophthalmic nurses may play a prominent role in screening, diagnosis, and management of specific ocular diseases. Remote areas have fewer specialists but a greater demand for primary healthcare providers, and ophthalmic nurses can fill the gap to provide ideal eye care.

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A study in the UK on the roles, responsibilities, and educational needs of ophthalmic specialist nurses showed that more than 70% undertook more than one active role, while 21% reported time as the main obstacle to further training [4]. However, there is no global data on the current eye care workforce, including ophthalmic nurses. Additionally, there is a lack of educational materials, training standards, and guidelines to determine the roles, responsibilities, professional standards, and job description of ophthalmic nurses. Barriers to training include a notable lack of learning resources.

A conducive healthcare policy, improvement of advocacy, and removal of potential conflicts of interest are key factors to establish ophthalmic nurses as proper ocular healthcare providers. Global standards in training, designing organizational strategic initiatives, and improving the nursing work environment are other important factors to address. Subsequently, these strategies may improve access, diagnosis, and, ultimately, patient quality of life. Engagement of the World Health Organization and associated bodies, in collaboration with other players such as non-governmental organizations, private sector entities, foundations, national societies, and academic institutions, is necessary to establish international standards for the training and responsibilities of ophthalmic nurses.

### ETHICAL DECLARATIONS

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