

eye *Facts and Fancies*

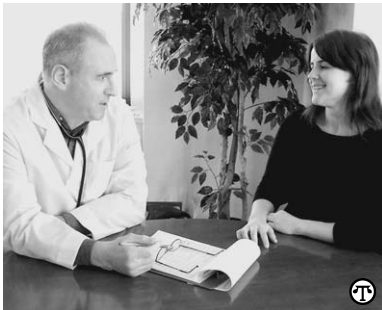
Consumers Urged To Learn More About Their Eye Care Providers

(NAPSA)—Melissa Baker was diagnosed with nearsightedness early in childhood—an unremarkable diagnosis. But with each regular visit to her family optometrist, she became more nearsighted and her glasses became thicker. It wasn't until a skiing accident led Melissa to an ophthalmologist at age 15 that she learned her true diagnosis: glaucoma, a disease that rarely affects the young. But it was already too late. The damage to her optic nerve was irreversible. Despite four surgeries, she eventually lost sight in her left eye. At 22, Melissa's left eye was replaced with a glass eye.

Melissa now dedicates her time to educating the public about eye care so that others won't needlessly lose their sight. She was recently named an honorary co-chair for the Glaucoma Research Foundation.

She's not alone. The National Consumers League (NCL) has also launched a new campaign urging consumers to learn more about eye care and to take a more active role in it. NCL, the nation's oldest consumer advocacy organization, recently commissioned a survey that found consumers—including those who wear glasses or contact lenses—are confused about the credentials and training of eye care providers. Nearly a third of respondents incorrectly thought optometrists have earned medical degrees.

To help consumers better understand eye care, NCL has produced a white paper about the state of eye care in the United States and created new Web resources and tips on its Web site, www.nclnet.org/health/eyes. The white paper clearly



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describes the need for patient education in today's challenging health care environment; one in which the increasing demand for more preventive care, in constant competition with an increasing sensitivity to cost control and productivity, has led to the expanding role of non-physician practitioners providing medical care. Most importantly, NCL provides a framework to guide consumers as they make eye care provider decisions, ultimately encouraging them to take control of their health care choices.

So who does what and when? The eye care arena is often confusing due to the number of professionals who offer services. Generally, however, the services are broken down as such:

- Opticians dispense and fit contact lenses and glasses
- Optometrists examine the eye to diagnose vision problems and abnormalities, and prescribe glasses, contact lenses and some medications
- Ophthalmologists are medical doctors who deliver total eye care

services, treat eye diseases and injuries and perform eye surgery.

Depending on the services you need, one type of provider may be more appropriate than another. In addition to the usual considerations of convenience, cost and established relationships, use these tips when selecting an eye care provider.

- Know what your needs are when going to an eye care provider. If you don't know what you need to have done, ask your primary care doctor.

- Look for diplomas, licenses and other qualifications and certifications displayed in the office.

- Ask the provider if he/she has sufficient training and experience to perform the procedure you need, especially when the procedure is more invasive than a regular office visit.

- If your eye care needs include surgery or treatment with medications, ask your provider if he/she is trained and licensed to perform these services. Ask how many times he/she has performed the service, and what kind of side effects and recovery time you can expect.

- If you do not have access to or are unsure about the eye care provider you need, ask your primary care doctor for a recommendation to properly address your needs.

If you encounter a problem in your treatment by an eye care provider that can not be resolved with the provider, do not hesitate to contact the state agency that oversees the conduct of the provider.

To learn more about NCL's new education effort, visit www.nclnet.org/health/eyes.