

## WHAT IS AN ORTHOPTIST?

Ortho = straight                      Optics = vision (and the eye)

An Orthoptist is an allied health professional who specialises in the investigation and management of problems related to eye movement / coordination and visual function.

The role of the Orthoptist has expanded greatly over the years from the traditional areas of binocular vision disorders and problems with eye coordination such as *strabismus* (turned eye) and *amblyopia* (reduced vision). Now Orthoptists may be found working in diverse areas such as:

- Ophthalmic clinics in Public Hospitals and the Private sector
- Early Childhood and Community Health including vision screening
- Rehabilitation and Low Vision clinics
- Private Orthoptic practises and “sports” vision
- Centres caring for the developmentally delayed, handicapped and visually impaired

## ROLES OF AN ORTHOPTIST

### Orthoptic Therapy

- Orthoptists are specialised in the visual assessment of babies and young children. Strabismus (turned eye or squint) or amblyopia (“lazy” eye or reduced vision) tends to occur in this age group and may cause permanent loss of vision unless detected and treated early. Orthoptists are expert at diagnosis and management of these conditions.
- People may suffer symptoms of eye strain and discomfort due to problems with eye muscle coordination. Orthoptists design and provide exercise programs to improve binocular function.
- Problems such as double vision may occur after head or eye injury or after stroke. Orthoptists can diagnose and assist in the management of these conditions.
- Visual training techniques may also be used to improve eye coordination and response in sports.

### Ophthalmic Assisting and specialised eye assessment

- Orthoptists are involved in a wide variety of investigative procedures to detect and diagnose disorders of eye health. Machines may be used to image eye structures such as the cornea (front of eye) and retina (back of eye); and to test visual function, such as visual fields (peripheral vision). Conditions include eye problems such as cataract, glaucoma (raised pressure in the eye), macular degeneration (reduced central vision), and general health problems affecting the eyes such as diabetes. Other areas include assessing and assisting in Refractive Laser Surgery and other eye surgical procedures.
- Orthoptists may work independently or in conjunction with Ophthalmologists (eye doctors) when performing these procedures.

### Rehabilitation

- Stroke and head injury may cause loss of vision (especially side/peripheral vision). Children and adults may have visual impairment due to developmental problems or eye disease. Orthoptists are involved in the assessment and diagnosis of these problems and can assist the person with visual aids and techniques to gain the best use of their remaining vision; and also provide information to assist other therapists involved in the person’s overall care.

# ORTHOPTIST

## Vision Screening

- Orthoptists work within the community to detect the presence of vision defects so appropriate vision care may be sought. Screening may be performed on babies and young children, the elderly and employees in occupations requiring high visual standards.

## QUALIFICATIONS

- University of Sydney – (post-graduate) Masters Qualification (4-5 years) – this is currently changing
- Latrobe University, Melbourne – 4 year Bachelor degree

## SALARY RANGE

1<sup>st</sup> year after graduation approximately \$46,000 pa. General clinicians' salary is up to approximately \$67,000 (year 8). Higher rates can apply in areas of specialisation and management roles. Rates in the private sector may vary. (Rates apply in NSW).

## CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

There is currently an undersupply of Orthoptists, so services are in demand and job prospects expanding. Career opportunities can expand to working in companies providing pharmaceuticals and medical equipment.

**CONTACT Us:** Recruitment Services Unit

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