

Optometry and Contact Lens Service

The Optometry and Contact Lens Service distinguishes itself by fostering a culture of subspecialty expertise, encouraging optometrists to go beyond routine care and pursue advanced training in specific fields. The Division is led by Ellen Butts, OD, who serves as the Division Chief and oversees all aspects of patient care and professional development. Comprehensive eye care is provided for both anterior and posterior segment conditions by a team of highly skilled optometrists and dedicated clinical staff who collaborate to deliver patient-centered, evidence-based care tailored to diverse vision needs.

This commitment to subspecialization is reflected in the Division's integrated care model, where optometrists hone their skills and lead in distinct areas. In glaucoma care, Dr. Butts provides advanced diagnostic and medical management in clinics alongside our glaucoma surgeons. William Smith, OD, as the Low Vision Division Chief, focuses on vision rehabilitation, while Kateryna Sanders, OD, brings additional expertise after completing a residency in low vision and ocular disease, supporting patients facing profound visual impairment and helping them overcome challenges in reading, mobility, social interaction, and self-care.

The program's dedication to interdisciplinary excellence extends to neuro-ophthalmology, with Emily DePew, OD, providing the Neuro-Ophthalmology Service with a weekly parallel clinic adding evaluation for therapeutic interventions such as prisms and specialty lenses. This allows patients access to individualized medical evaluation and diagnosis. In the Dry Eye Clinic, Marissa Heary, OD, collaborates with Sabrina Mukhtar, MD, MPH, to expand access and introduce advanced procedures, such as punctal plug insertion, amniotic membrane placement, intense pulsed light treatments, and lid exfoliation via BlephEx. Dr. Heary's expertise in fitting scleral contact lenses further exemplifies the Division's innovative approach, offering both refractive and therapeutic benefits tailored to patient needs.

RESIDENCY PROGRAM AND ACADEMIC INITIATIVES

The University of Pittsburgh Medical Center Optometric Residency program is affiliated with the Pennsylvania College of Optometry at Drexel University and offers two residency positions: one in ocular disease and one in combined low vision rehabilitation and ocular disease.

The ocular disease residency provides in-depth exposure to the diagnosis and management of a broad spectrum of anterior and posterior segment

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conditions, equipping residents with advanced clinical skills necessary for handling complex cases often encountered in medical optometry. Residents benefit from direct mentorship by subspecialty-trained faculty, participate in interdisciplinary rounds, and are actively involved in patient care alongside ophthalmologists and other healthcare professionals.

Both positions emphasize scholarly activity and professional development. Residents are encouraged to conduct clinical research, contribute to academic publications, and present at national conferences. These experiences not only refine clinical acumen but also prepare graduates for leadership roles in optometric education, research, and patient care. The dual focus on advanced clinical practice and academic enrichment ensures that residents emerge as well-rounded optometrists, ready to make meaningful contributions to the profession.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH

Optometrists actively engage in outreach programs such as Mission of Mercy and Community Vision Day, delivering comprehensive vision screenings to at-risk and underserved communities. A highlight of these efforts was the large-scale eyeglass drive coordinated by the UPMC Community Ophthalmology and Remote Access Programs (CORAP) team at Washington High School, where optometry volunteers provided updated prescriptions for 122 students and distributed 102 pairs of glasses through Changing Lives Through Lenses. In 2025, mobile vision clinics further expanded access by supplying 117 additional pairs of glasses to students in need. Looking ahead, CORAP and Washington High School plan to host biannual glasses drives in 2026, continuing their commitment to improving visual health and supporting the academic success of hundreds of students. ■

