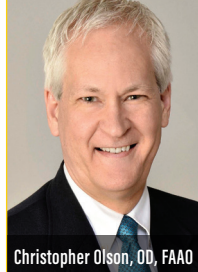




Alan Kabat, OD



Chandra Mickles, OD, MS, FAAO, FSLs



Christopher Olson, OD, FAAO



Desiree Owen, OD, MBA, FAAO



Emmanuella Okocha, OD



Hersh Patel, OD, FAAO



Josephine Scholten, OD



Xavier Thompson, OD, MS



Victoria Dzurinko, OD, MBA



Sean Powell, OD, MS



Sarah Connolly, OD, FAAO, ABO



Rutvi Doshi, OD, FAAO, FSLs



Megan Walton, OD



Kimberly Theis, OD



Joanne Hu, OD

MAKING THE MOVE TO A CAREER IN INDUSTRY



Facts, experiences, and insights from optometrists who made the switch.

BY ARTHUR CHAN, PHD, MBA

Every optometrist I've met has not only been a wealth of knowledge, but also personable and fun. Many people imagine optometrists spending their lives in clinics, diagnosing and treating eye diseases and asking which is better: one or two. However, that perception is rapidly changing with a growing number of ODs not just beginning to work with industry, but work for industry, as leaders of eye care companies are coming to recognize that optometrists are valuable additions to their organizations (see *Career Profiles of Industry ODs*).

I had the honor of interviewing a handful of ODs who work in industry, all of whom I deeply respect. They shared with me what inspired them

to make a career change and what enables them to thrive in industry.

INSPIRATIONS AND ASPIRATIONS

When asked what the driving force was behind her taking the leap into a

role in industry, **Chandra Mickles, OD, MS, FAAO, FSLs**, North America professional education lead of Myopia at Johnson & Johnson Vision Care, discussed her strong desire to make a meaningful difference in eye care for many patients beyond those she would see in her former mode of practice. "It's amazing," she said. "The work that we do touches the lives of millions of people around the world."

Rutvi Doshi, OD, FAAO, FSLs, medical director at Tarsus Pharmaceuticals, said since she was young, she always took an interest in science and innovation. "I also wanted to be a part of something where I could help create value that could have a lasting impact on patients. After almost a decade in clinical practice, I realized that a career in industry is a perfect intersection of my goals and interests."

Inspiration also came from positive interactions with medical science liaisons (MSLs) and sales reps, as well as

AT A GLANCE

- ▶ Being able to innovate and affect even more patients beyond the clinic is why many optometrists choose a career with an eye care company.
- ▶ Optometrists who work in industry credit their mentors as a driving factor in their success.
- ▶ Optometrists believe increased exposure to industry as a potential career path for students in schools would be beneficial.



mentors and role models. **Emmanuella Okocha, OD**, regional field director at AbbVie, decided to join industry after hearing her mentor Dr. Mickles speak about a product and seeing the impression that it made.

Christopher Olson, OD, FAAO, medical science liaison at Alcon Vision, was inspired by colleague **Greg Hicks, OD**, after seeing how one can use clinical experiences to make contributions in industry. **Alan Kabat, OD, FAAO**, medical director at Oyster Point Pharma, and **Victoria Dzurinko, OD, MBA**, senior manager of Doctor Engagement at EssilorLuxottica, both consulted for industry before joining the ranks, providing them with relevant experience in various functions while launching products. **Sean Powell, OD, MS**, who serves as senior director of Global Surgical Sales Training at Alcon, has a love for research that inspired him to pursue a role that involved more than clinical practice.

A GUIDING LIGHT

Curious about specific training or activities an optometrist transitioning from clinical practice to industry might find useful in helping them succeed in their journey, several of the ODs provided their insights and experiences.

"What helped me the most was having incredible colleagues who were there to answer all of my ridiculous questions, and fantastic managers who supported my professional development," said **Xavier Thompson, OD, MS**, field director, medical science liaison, at Janssen Pharmaceuticals.

Similarly, **Hersh Patel, OD, FAAO**, medical director, clinical development, at Iveric Bio, said that finding the right mentors was a key piece in helping him transition and succeed. "Fortunately, I was lucky enough to find this early on in my career," he noted.

Joanne Hu, OD, associate medical director at Novartis, echoes those sentiments. "I had a great mentor who helped with my transition into industry.

She is also an optometrist and helped with my onboarding," said Dr. Hu.

"You don't realize how strict and scrutinized your interactions are with industry until you really get inside,"

Desiree Owen, OD, MBA, FAAO, global medical director at AbbVie commented.

Dr. Doshi added, "At Tarsus we assign everyone an onboarding buddy—a dedicated resource for not just the first couple of weeks, but for 6 whole months to ensure that there's someone to hold your hand and navigate a world vastly different from clinical practice."

Dr. Olson suggested taking industry-wide conferences and courses. "I benefited greatly by attending the Medical Affairs Strategic Summit (MASS) East, MASS West, and the Medical Science Liaison Society annual meetings and learned much about the profession," he said. Additionally, he found seeking education online through Coursera was useful.

THE PRESENT AND THE PAST

Now that everyone is fully settled into their roles, I asked them what they enjoy the most about their work opportunities, and what they find most rewarding. Drs. Powell, Owen, and Patel all agreed that optometrists sometime feel repetition in clinical practice, but in industry, their work is dynamic and never routine. Dr. Patel elaborated, explaining, "I am faced with different challenges on a regular basis. Each challenge I overcome continues to build my skill set, which guides me in making right decisions to protect and help patients."

For **Josephine Scholten, OD**, medical science liaison at Novartis, talking science, learning from key opinion leaders (KOLs), and bringing insights to shape strategy and develop better products that meet both patient and physician needs is most rewarding.

Dr. Thompson found that he most enjoys being a part of cutting-edge science and technology. "What's most rewarding is working towards finding potential treatments for patients where

currently none are available," he said.

Megan Walton, OD, senior medical science liaison at Regeneron, mentioned she most enjoys engaging with investigators participating in clinical trials, knowing her efforts can help bring new and needed medications to patients who need them. To which **Sarah Connolly, OD, FAAO, ABO**, also a senior medical science liaison at Regeneron, chimed in, "the idea that my impact on these trials may lead to an approved product that could revolutionize how conditions are treated and prevent blindness makes me thrilled to get up every day, even if the day starts at 3 AM and ends at 11 PM!"

Of course, I had to ask what, if anything, these practitioners miss about their clinical past. Not surprisingly, everyone's response was their patients. Whether caring for multigenerational families, like Drs. Doshi and Olson did, or overseeing emergency optometric care and foreign body removals, as Dr. Walton loved, that one-on-one patient connection is often missed as ODs move into industry.

"I miss the day-to-day connection I had with patients and hearing about their lives and seeing the direct results of treatment," said Dr. Okocha. Dr. Hu also agreed. "I miss my patients. After years of clinical practice, I had some loyal patients."

Dr. Thompson offered some advice: "It's helpful and inspiring to know that, while I no longer see patients face to face, I have the privilege of working on potential therapies that will improve the lives of all patients across the globe."

Although it may not be possible to have time to see patients with the demands of an industry career, Dr. Owen noted that she's still able to fulfill her yearn for patient care by volunteering on mission trips.

PREPARING FOR THE PART

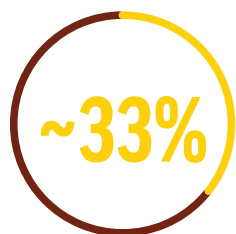
Having empathy for and relating to their customers and understanding

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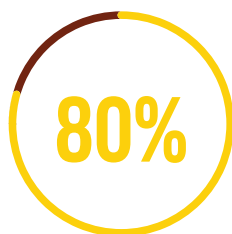


CAREER PROFILES OF INDUSTRY ODS

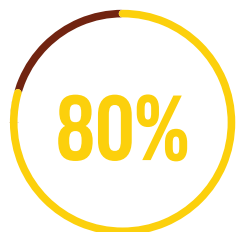
Learn more about the experiences and jobs of the ODs interviewed in this article.



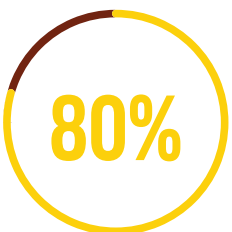
Percentage of ODs who have had a position in industry for longer than 5 years.



Percentage who have taken roles in medical affairs, either as a medical science liaison (MSL), MSL leader, or medical director.



Percentage of industry ODs who work remotely



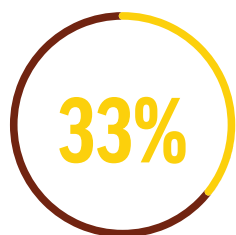
Percentage of industry ODs who travel 20% to 50% of the time



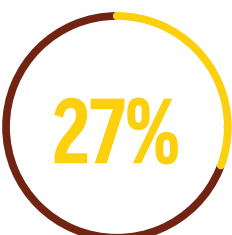
Percentage of industry ODs who travel >50% of the time



One OD can still juggle clinical practice on the side and have direct patient interactions

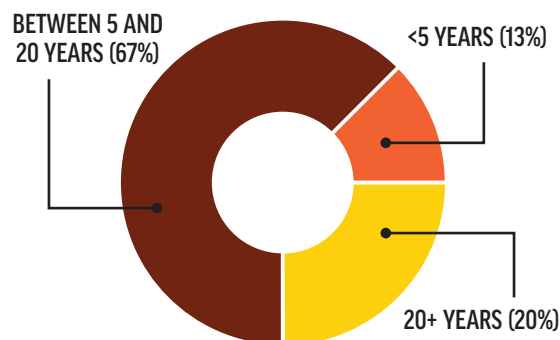


Percentage of industry ODs who are managed by ODs

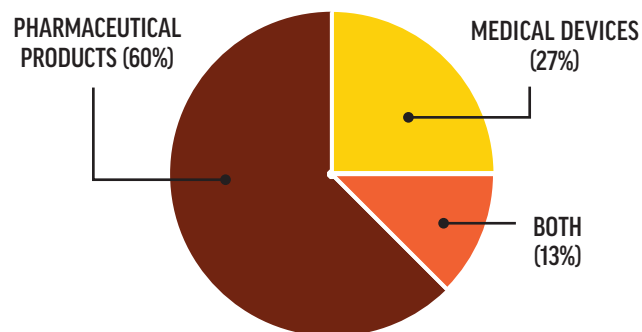


Percentage of ODs who are people leaders

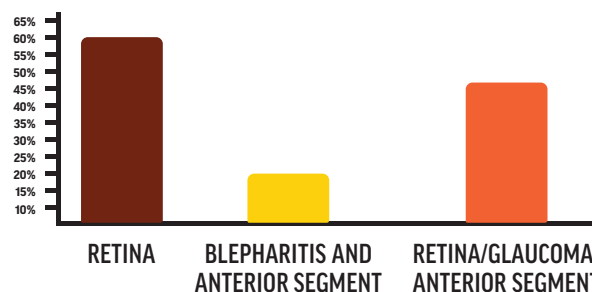
YEARS OF CLINICAL EXPERIENCE PRIOR TO JOINING INDUSTRY



PRODUCT AREAS IN WHICH INDUSTRY ODS WORK



AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION



Source: Data gathered from an informal survey of the 15 optometrists interviewed for this article.



(continued from page 25)

the needs of eye care professionals and the realities of patient care are unique aspects that ODs bring to their companies and why many industry leaders are seeking them to be a part of their teams. I wondered if there were any other unmet needs for education or experience, and asked the group what optometry schools, optometric associations, and companies could do more of to educate the next generation of optometrists to prepare them for roles in industry.

Dr. Patel suggested that schools provide more exposure to clinical studies and Drs. Thompson and Scholten shared their thoughts that students could benefit from industry externships, fellowships, and rotations.

Dr. Kabat, who had been on the academic side for more than 25 years prior to joining industry, said, "Creating optional curriculum in the schools, and, for those who have already graduated, through organizations such as the [American Optometric Association], would enable many more to learn about industry as a career path."

Dr. Doshi, who has also been a professor, shared additional ideas, such as "providing exposure to optometry students through educational programs, hands-on learning opportunities, scholarships, internship programs, and career guidance by the alumni association, to name a few," she said.

"I think a type of panel discussion during third year would be beneficial," suggested Dr. Powell.

With increasing interest among optometry students pursuing industry careers, I am optimistic that stronger partnerships between the schools, optometric societies, and companies will bring these careers to light.

PARTING WORDS

My final ask of this group of optometrists in industry was for them to provide their top piece of advice for other ODs looking to make the move

WANT TO GET MORE INVOLVED WITH INDUSTRY?

Are you interested in ways you can work with industry without giving up your clinical practice? I asked this illustrious group of industry optometrists what initiatives their practicing colleagues can take to be more involved with industry. Everyone encouraged engaging with medical science liaisons and sales representatives. Knowing what may interest you, whether it's research, speaking, or perhaps even social media education, and conveying these interests to those already in industry is a great first step. Below are a few other tips.

Xavier Thompson, OD, MS: I always encourage ODs to share their career interest with their sales representatives. Ask about potential speaking engagements and opportunities within industry. It's a great way to expand your network.

Desiree Owen, OD, MBA, FAAO: Your sales representatives know you well, and what you may be a good fit for and who to connect you with. Let them know you are interested in getting involved.

Rutvi Doshi, OD, FAAO, FSLs: Seek opportunities at national or regional conferences to meet with industry professionals, learn about new products and technologies on the horizon, and inquire about research opportunities (eg, post marketing studies).

to industry. The recurring theme of networking and the importance of mentors was once again highlighted.

Dr. Okocha: Do your research, find your why, and reach out to those who you know are already in industry.

Dr. Patel: Be ready to work hard and find great mentors.

Dr. Owen: Network!

Dr. Dzurinko: Figure out your passion when it comes to patient care. That will often guide you to which industry partner you would like to pursue.

Kimberly Theis, OD, medical science liaison, Alcon: When attending conferences, network with industry partners and KOLs.

Dr. Mickles: Follow your passion and leverage good industry mentors and sponsors.

Dr. Scholten: Develop a good rapport with your sales reps and medical science liaisons.

Dr. Thompson: Be persistent.

Dr. Kabat: Seek out someone who

has made the jump themselves and interview them.

Dr. Powell: Network! Meet as many people in industry as you can and let them know what you are interested in.

Dr. Connolly: Don't be in a rush to jump into industry right after school. You are more valuable to industry once you have practical clinical experience, and only that experience is what can truly help affect change that is so desperately needed for patients.

Dr. Doshi: Network, network, network!

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