

TAKING THAT EXTRA STEP



A resident's perspective on her choice to pursue further training before entering full-time practice on her own.

BY **CARISSA M. HINTZ, OD**

During my last year of optometry school, I worried about what the transition into the real world of practice would be like. Even though I was getting an excellent education at an amazing school, I still feared that I hadn't learned enough to properly care for patients while practicing full-scope optometry.

To address that concern, I decided to first pursue a residency in an OD/MD private practice. I wanted to learn to practice to the fullest

scope of my license and to become more comfortable managing complex cases. Although there was a learning curve during the transition from student to doctor, I quickly found that trusting my gut and what I learned in my education would be essential.

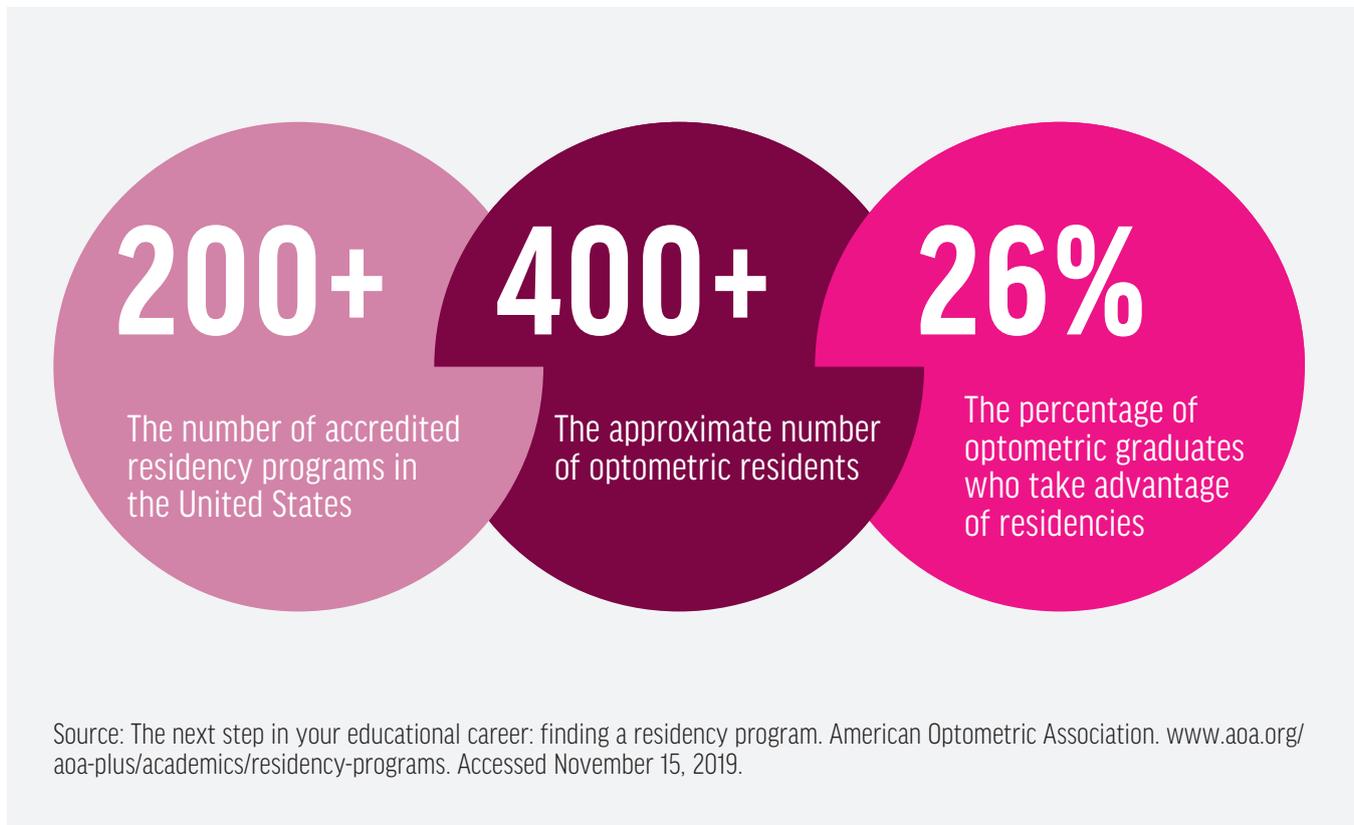
NO REGRETS

Residency has been a great choice for me. I feel as though I have grown so much as a clinician in a short period of time and have become more

comfortable with surgical comanagement and managing complex ocular disease cases. I have realized that my education provided me with the tools necessary for making good clinical decisions and that transitioning into the real world of practicing helped me to refine those tools.

I am in a highly medical, referral-based clinic, where I see ocular disease on a daily basis. My typical day consists of cataract and laser vision correction evaluations, postoperative visits, ocular disease consultations, and annual examinations. I enjoy being in a high-volume, highly medical practice where I can practice to the fullest scope of my license. I hope to continue working in a surgical setting once I complete my residency.

A benefit of being a resident is that I have a team of doctors to turn to when I need a second opinion or some reassurance. My residency has given me plenty of experience comanaging patients among many subspecialties. Working in a practice that is focused on anterior segment care, I regularly refer to many ophthalmology subspecialties,



including neuro-ophthalmology, retina, and binocular vision. I have also made referrals outside of ophthalmology to primary care physicians and ER physicians when a patient's ocular findings correlated to systemic concerns.

LEARNING ON THE GO

Of course, when you start new at any practice, there is an adjustment period as you learn staff roles, the electronic health record system, new testing equipment, etc. A big learning curve for me came with understanding how to chart appropriately in a surgical setting.

I also felt that, although I had learned about different IOL and laser vision correction options during school, I hadn't mastered the art of helping a patient choose which lens or surgery option was best for his or her eyes. Residency has also helped me gain proficiency with the technology required to properly plan for surgery.

This is one reason why I urge students who are interested in a

specialty to pursue a residency. A residency focusing on a particular area that you are passionate about will allow you to delve deeper into the art and science of that field. In my case, residency is expanding my knowledge of and experience in surgical comanagement and ocular disease.

READY OR NOT, YOU'RE ACTUALLY READY

Residency is not the right choice for everyone. Many of my classmates have transitioned into primary care practice settings. In some cases these practices have limited capability for ancillary testing. These classmates have made valuable connections with specialized referral practices in their communities that can perform additional ancillary testing for them as needed.

Whether your transition from student to doctor involves supplementing your education with a residency or jumping straight into practice, understand that you already have

the tools necessary to properly care for patients. Understand, too, that there are always specialists who can collaborate with you in the care of patients, if your own practice does not offer the services needed. Additionally, in most practice settings there are other doctors to whom you can turn for advice.

Residency or not, any transition period will include a learning curve. That said, don't doubt yourself. Your education prepared you better than you might think, and you will get through that learning curve in no time. All of the hard work and late nights studying have provided you with the tools and knowledge necessary to make it in the real world of practicing optometry. ■

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