



AFFILIATE FOCUS

More than meets the eye

How Oklahoma increased public understanding of comprehensive eye exams vs. vision screenings

To help school nurses and teachers, parents and students in the Putnam City School District understand the difference between vision screenings and eye exams, and the importance of comprehensive eye exams at an early age, Ruthie Ruan, O.D., project director and Healthy Eyes Healthy People® (HEHP) grant recipient, began working with the Oklahoma Association of

vision screening tools, administered by a highly trained screener, can miss one-third of children with eye or vision disorders. Children may be able to see letters 20 feet away, but their eyes might not be able to work together to read materials 12 inches away. That's why comprehensive eye examinations by an optometric physician are critical.

Parents often mistaken-

prehensive eye exams," said Dr. Ruan. "We distributed more than 28,000 fliers, delivered OAOP vision care educational materials to the School Nurse Organization of Oklahoma and its members, lectured at the state's school nurse conference, and provided an eye exam workshop for school nurses."

Parents were educated on the common signs and symptoms of eye problems, and volunteers emphasized that while vision screening is helpful it is not equal to a comprehensive eye exam. As a result, the program has significantly increased the number of students who received an eye exam in 2012, almost doubling the number as compared to 2011.

"The fliers emphasized the importance of comprehensive eye exams; the lecture educated school nurses on common children's vision and eye health problems and the difference between vision screenings and comprehensive eye exams; and the workshop demonstrated eye exam skills to help school nurses with their daily practice," Dr. Ruan explained.

Late last year, Saundra Naifeh, OAOP executive director, and Dr. Ruan attended the SUCCESS for Life Symposium held at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center in Oklahoma City. The symposium, organized by Sooner SUCCESS, a program of the Oklahoma University Child Study Center, provided a platform for local communities and organizations to collaborate on facilitating a comprehensive, unified system of health, social and educational services for Oklahoma children.

"The SUCCESS for

Parents often mistakenly think a vision screening is an eye exam, and do not take their children for a comprehensive exam once they pass a vision screening at school.

Optometric Physicians (OAOP) and the School Nurse Organization of Oklahoma. Together they educate school nurses, teachers, parents and students. The program has been very successful, reaching thousands of Oklahoma children in Putnam City schools and almost doubling the number receiving eye exams in one year.

Most vision screenings test only for visual acuity. Even the most sophisticated

ly think a vision screening is an eye exam, and therefore do not take their children to eye care professionals for a comprehensive exam once they pass a vision screening at school. In fact, a high percentage of students never receive follow-up exams by eye care professionals even when they fail the screening.

"With the OAOP's support, we educated nearly 10,000 pre-K to fifth-grade students and their families on the importance of com-



Technician John Basgall, at left, and Ruthie Ruan, O.D., work together offering pre-kindergarten eye exams.



Ruthie Ruan, O.D., at right, offers an eye exam workshop for school nurses.

Life Symposium provided us the opportunity to network and introduce the HEHP program to state agents and other local organizations," Dr. Ruan explained.

State legislative and health care authorities, health care experts, and local organization leaders came together to discuss successful community initiatives and address the importance of collaborations. The symposium provided an opportunity for participants to understand the most current and pressing children's health issues in Oklahoma, and learn about organizational management, outcome measurement and, more important, how communities can work together.

"The OAOP understands the importance of communication and is actively seeking opportunities for collaborative support from the local health department and other organizations. Symposium participation was a great way to get started," Said Dr. Ruan.

During the meeting, Naifeh and Dr. Ruan introduced the HEHP program to state department of health representatives and other

agents. They shared their concerns about Oklahoma children's vision and eye health issues and their efforts to promote comprehensive eye exams for children, stressing the importance of vision for success in school and in life.

"We believe that sharing our views and concerns with local authorities and communities on children's vision and eye health issues will facilitate continued success and our long-term goal of improving children's vision in our region," said Dr. Ruan.

Dr. Ruan's dedication and commitment to the program speaks for itself. During the past year, she and her staff worked diligently with pre-K to fifth-grade students, their parents and educators in Putnam City Schools to boost eye care awareness and promote the importance of comprehensive eye exams for children.

"We are grateful for all the support we received from the American Optometric Association (AOA) Foundation, Luxottica and the OAOP in 2012, and we look forward to continuing our work in 2013," she said.