Colleagues: Career Talk on Orthoptics Notes

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Hi, my name is…
I am an Orthoptist at …
Today, I'll introduce you to the field of Orthoptics and what it involves as a career change or postgraduate opportunity.

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Raise your hand… what is Orthoptics?
Is it related to teeth, feet, bones, or eyes?

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Orthoptics is a specialised area of Allied Health that focuses on the eyes. The term comes from Greek, meaning "straight eyes" (Orth – straight, Optic – eyes). Orthoptists specialise in how the eyes move and how they work together with the brain.

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There are 14 Allied Health Professions, each playing a vital role in patient care, and Orthoptics is one of them. Working in this field is incredibly rewarding—every day brings new challenges and opportunities to make a real difference. Orthoptics is a career that keeps you engaged, inspired, and motivated, knowing that the work you do directly improves patients' lives. As an Allied Health Professional, you build meaningful connections with patients, witness their progress, and contribute to their well-being in a truly impactful way.

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I'm just going to show you a video here about orthoptics

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You heard the Orthoptist mention Optometrists and Ophthalmologists. It's easy to confuse them since all these professions start with an "O"!

- High street opticians are familiar to most people, and hospital optometrists also prescribe glasses and diagnose eye diseases.
- Ophthalmologists are medical doctors who specialise in treating eye conditions.
- Orthoptists, however, focus on diagnosing and treating eye movement disorders and conditions like strabismus (squints) and double vision.

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As mentioned in the video Orthoptists have an extremely varied caseload. Typically, their work with babies and children involves the management and treatment of reduced vision development and misaligned eyes or a squint. With adults, they will manage and treat a range of conditions leading to double vision or visual field defects. In the UK the majority of orthoptists work in eye clinics in NHS hospitals. Some orthoptists also work in community clinics, specialist centres for children with disabilities or carry out vision screening in schools.

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Let's think about a child with strabismus (a turned eye). What do you think they experience?

- Would they see double?
- Would their vision be affected differently to someone with straight eyes?
- How would we manage this?

The child wouldn't experience double vision because the brain suppresses the image from the turned eye, but this can lead to amblyopia (reduced vision in one eye), which can be treated with patching or drops. They will not be seeing 3D vision like someone with straight eyes. Adults, however, would experience double vision, as their vision is fully developed.

For more information about wearing glasses, strabismus and amblyopia, follow BIOS #WePatch campaign.

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This is a small example of some of the tests an orthoptist might use in clinic to assess eye movements and 3D vision, as well as vision testing in some of our younger patients.

One aspect of orthoptics which is exciting is adapting these tests for each patient's abilities to understand how they see the world, which helps form an accurate diagnosis and treatment plan.

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Here are a few examples of management plans Orthoptists use. For instance, a child may undergo patching treatment to improve vision in their weaker eye, or an adult with double vision may benefit from prism lenses or occlusion to manage the condition. We might also recommend eye exercises to alleviate symptoms.

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I hope that's given you a good introduction to Orthoptics. Take a moment to read through this summary.
Does anyone have any questions so far?

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What we've discussed so far is considered core Orthoptics, but there are also many opportunities to specialise and grow your career. With increasing demand in ophthalmology, you can specialise in areas like neuro-ophthalmology, medical retina, glaucoma, low vision, and special educational needs. You can even reach advanced clinical practice, where you work at the same level as specialised doctors in clinics. There are also roles in healthcare management, leadership, research, teaching, and even international work. The variety of options means there's always room to grow and develop within Orthoptics.

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Here's a video on the different career paths available within Orthoptics.

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Here are some of the institutions offering undergraduate and postgraduate courses in Orthoptics.

- University of Liverpool and Sheffield offer 3-year undergraduate courses.
- GCU offers a 4-year undergraduate course.
- UCL and Liverpool offer 2-year pre-registration postgraduate courses for those who have already completed a degree.
- Some universities, like Sheffield and Liverpool, offer foundation years to help mature students transition into the course.
- There is also an Orthoptic apprenticeship route in the pipeline.

Given the high demand for Orthoptists in the NHS, there's a learning support fund available to eligible students each year.

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A recruitment survey was sent out to all heads of department via BIOS at the end of February. It asked questions around whether departments had vacancies, at which bands, and how many times people failed to recruit. It also aimed to look at the number of applicants departments received per vacancy. It then asked around whether people used any incentives to recruit and what they had tried and worked

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Here is information about banding.
Most of the vacancies were for Band 6 positions. Band 7 roles were the most difficult to recruit for. Data for Band 8 positions was limited, as fewer posts were advertised.

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Here is some information about the percentage of Trusts per region that had vacancies. 52% of Trusts reported having at least one vacancy and many Trusts reported more than one

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Here is some information on the failure to recruit in the different regions. South England had the most challenges, with up to 9 reposts without recruitment.

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Here is some information on the current orthoptic education providers and how they are distributed throughout the UK.

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This shows what kind of incentives were used to aid recruitment. 2/3rd of departments did not use incentives as part of their recruitment process.

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These are examples of free incentives used, such as Annex 21 - band progression run-throughs

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These are some examples of incentives used with costs incurred

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Recruitment is particularly challenging for such a small allied health profession, with significant difficulties observed in Southern England and Wales. To address this, we must raise the profile of orthoptics and support local visibility efforts. Additionally, it's crucial to consider offering incentives to recruit in areas where there is greater struggle. When the apprenticeship program becomes available, it could potentially serve as a solution for areas with low visibility.

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If you’re keen to learn more, we offer a free 3-week Orthoptics course on FutureLearn. We also encourage you to contact your local Orthoptic department for further discussion. Visit the BIOS website or contact us for further details.

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Thank you!
Please scan this QR code to visit the BIOS page for further information.
Any questions?