

New optometry concept set to open first practice in York County

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Adam Smith, vice president of Medical Optometry America and Leslie O'Dell, regional clinical director at MOA and the incoming manager of the company's Hopewell Township practice, make a site visit to the building set to house the new practice later this year. PHOTO PROVIDED.

A York County optometrist with over 15 years of experience offering medical eye care in the region will lead the first practice of a new Montgomery County-based optometry company.

A loss in corrective lens sales thanks to online competitors has started to push traditional optometrists out of their primary source of revenue.

Medical Optometry America (MOA), a new organization looking to franchise optometry practices across the country, plans to capitalize on the changing market by having its practices focus on non-surgical eye care.

Optometrists are trained to identify, diagnose and treat medical eye diseases and conditions such as glaucoma, macular degeneration and dry eye disease, but have historically focused their practices on the prescription and sales of eyewear.

With the advent of what many call the "silver tsunami," the aging boomer population will have an unprecedented demand for non-surgical eye care which optometrists are equipped to provide, said Ken Krieg, CEO of MOA.

“The historical value proposition of going to an optometrist was vision correction. You got an exam by an optometrist, they would write a prescription for their eyewear and historically you bought those glasses from the optometrist,” Krieg said. “What changed for our optometry friends was the coming of online distribution centers that have siphoned away businesses.”

The diminishing sales of vision correction for optometrists provided Medical Optometry America the opportunity to build a platform for optometrists to focus on the non-surgical eye care portion of their profession, according to Krieg.

“The demand for non-surgical medical eye care is accelerating and yet most patients, their primary care physicians and other health professionals, are not fully aware they can access this level of care from a highly-qualified medical optometrist,” said Dr. Jim Thimons, chief medical officer at MOA. “These dynamics have created a market void and MOA is well-positioned to work with optometrists on a national level to meet this demand and fill this void.”

Enter Dr. Leslie O’Dell, regional clinical director at MOA and the incoming manager of what is expected to be the company’s first practice in Hopewell Township, York County.

O’Dell has over 15 years of experience providing medical eye care in the region and has focused primarily on the kind of optometry that MOA wants to highlight with its practices.

While the local optometrist has offered non-surgical medical eye care for years, she said that leading the MOA practice brings with it the support of a franchisee with human resources and marketing that she couldn’t have on her own.

In Hopewell Township, O’Dell’s practice will act as a middleman of sorts, between physicians and primary care doctors that can recommend patients for non-surgical care at MOA and the ophthalmologists that can provide surgical care.

As part of their services, MOA practices will offer an annual eye physical that will allow patients to better understand their eye health prior to needing immediate care and will address other potential medical problems that can be detected through the eye. Krieg said the idea is for MOA practices to be viewed as a gateway to a surgeon and a holding place for when patients don’t need a surgeon.

MOA expects to open the new practice late this year or early next year, followed by potential practices in northern Virginia, Chicago and Philadelphia.

O’Dell said that the concept is a good fit for the region and noted the lack of eye-based medical care in and around Shrewsbury.

“Shrewsbury is a growing population. This community is also growing medically,” she said. “But in this community there is a huge void with medical eye care— if you need eye surgery you need to travel somewhere in a 25 mile radius.”

While Hopewell Township is a good location for the practice, Krieg said the primary motivation to choose York County was O’Dell herself.

“She is a known commodity in York and a known provider. For me it was more about backing Leslie,” he said. “We want the early centers to be successful and support the brand at the highest level, so we are being very careful about who we are willing to associate with medically.”

MOA's 4,000-square-foot Hopewell Township practice will be located at 781 Far Hills Drive, Unit 100 and is set to employ eight to ten support staff. O'Dell will also be joined by a residency-trained associate doctor.

O'Dell said that MOA's mission of having optometrists focus on eye care is a great opportunity for students graduating from optometry school, many of which learn everything they need to provide non-surgical eye care to patients, but go on to work at eye-care center's that focus on prescription eyewear.

"Being part of something that can change my profession is super exciting," she said. "Being able to do that in my hometown in Pennsylvania is a dream come true."



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