



Optometry in 2050, Will it Exist?

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Received: November 28, 2022

Published: September 09, 2023

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In 30 years, will Optometry as we know it still exist?

Robots will have taken over most jobs within 30 years leaving humanity facing its 'biggest challenge ever' to find meaning in life when work is no longer necessary, according to experts. Professor Moshe Vardi, of Rice University, in the US, claims that many middle-class professionals will be outsourced to machines within the next few decades leaving workers with more leisure time than they have ever experienced.

Speaking at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science annual meeting in Washington, Prof. Moshe said the rise of robots could lead to unemployment rates greater than 50 per cent.

"We are approaching a time when machines will be able to outperform humans at almost any task", said Vardi, a professor in computational engineering.

Eye health aside, any Optometrist honest with himself will concede the primary job of an Optometrist is to refract. Refraction, although definitely a skill and art, is at risk of extinction due to advances in technology. Although technology is a threat to many aspects of modern eye care, and while one can argue about the timing/immediacy of such events (i.e. are we on the cusp of wholesale change now, or is the landscape going to largely be the same 10 years from now?), I consider refraction particularly susceptible to obsolescence in the continuum of facets of eye care (which includes things like eye health assessments, appliances for seeing, and surgery).

I consider visual/seeing appliances to eventually be at the mercy of technology as well, but I believe that era remains farther off. But when we have the world's most wealthiest corporations such as Google blurring the line between technology and every-day consumerism/physiology (e.g. Google Glass), and predicting that the human brain will be embedded with data chips by 2040 (while actively pursuing that goal), it's hard to see how human-performed refraction will continue to be a paid-for service in the future. Kiosks already exist for refraction today in the U.S., not to mention an open source iPhone app is available for vision screening.

How long do Optometrists have to change their practice approach? For those who will not be "retired" in the next 20 years, how much longer will the conventional practice of optometry be able to sustain an Optometrist's career? Will those early in their careers today have to eventually re-educate themselves and re-enter the workforce in another capacity?. These are certain questions to ponder our minds upon.

It is therefore high time for our Optometry and Eye Care professional community to come together and bring novel additions to our practice apart from the regular refraction and develop our skills in our areas of interest such as; Myopia control strategies, Dry Eye management, Systemic disease referrals to respective practices. This would be the only way for us to contribute and support the healthcare system as primary healthcare professionals. We need to improve and update our skills in accordance to the latest advances of the time. We need to match our skillsets to be able to fight for the changes in the legislation to be able to prescribe therapeutics etc., this would require major changes in the curriculum in Optometry courses. Let's hope that our career evolves and our fellow colleagues reach new heights of success and prosperity.