

DES MOINES  HEALTHCARE PROFILES

Keeping Iowa's Youngest Hawkeyes Sharp

Wolfe Eye Clinic is Iowa's go-to practice for a specialist in pediatric eye care.

Anyone who has raised a child knows just how difficult it can be to get young children to sit still and follow directions. Dr. Derek Bitner, a pediatric ophthalmologist with Wolfe Eye Clinic in Des Moines, knows this scenario well; many of his patients are meeting him for the first time, and none of them are there by choice. But he wouldn't have it any other way.

"I am happiest when I get to work with kids," he says. "There's something so satisfying and gratifying about waking up every morning and knowing I'm going to be helping children."

Seeing the Signs

The easiest optical problem for parents to detect in children is misalignment of the eyes. However, some of the clues



A Century in Sight

Wolfe Eye Clinic's roots trace all the way back to when Dr. Otis R. Wolfe and Dr. Frederick L. Wahrer founded the practice in 1919 in Marshalltown, Iowa. Dr. Wolfe's three sons and other surgeons would later join the practice, which was among the first of its kind to provide comprehensive medical eye care in a clinic setting.

In the decades that followed, Wolfe Eye Clinic gained a national reputation for excellence, innovating new treatment methods and surgical devices. Today, Wolfe Eye Clinic is a recognized diagnostic and surgical center offering the broadest range of professional care in the specialties of ophthalmology. With more than 45 physicians offering patient care in more than 40 locations throughout Iowa, Wolfe Eye Clinic provides expert specialty eye care and convenience to all Iowans.

aren't so obvious, such as difficulty with getting around, headaches, and poor performance in class. For any optical problems, early intervention is a must.

"The brain is learning to see during the first eight to 10 years of life," explains Dr. Bitner. "Because of how well a child's brain is learning at that age, full correction of eye problems is possible. But if problems go unchecked or unnoticed, there is a chance of long-term damage."

In Good Hands

Wolfe Eye Clinic's physician staff includes fellowship-trained specialists in virtually every aspect of eye care, which means it's extremely rare that a child will have a condition that can't be diagnosed and treated in the office. When required, surgery is performed in the practice's on-site surgical center, which keeps the practice's pediatric patients in a comfortable, familiar environment while saving parents money on operating room fees.

Pediatricians are often the first to detect vision problems among young patients; Dr. Bitner estimates that four out of every five pediatric patients at Wolfe Eye Clinic are referred by their primary care provider or family optometrist. The balance, though, are children whose parents bring them directly to the practice.

Regardless of how they get there, parents feel quickly reassured they've come to the right place.

"Families tell us all the time that their kids have never been as cooperative with an eye exam as they are here," says Dr. Bitner. "Everyone that works here, from the front office staff to the nurses, enjoys working with kids. That's what sets us apart."



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