



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Canadian Optometrists Alarmed as B.C. Government Moves to Sanction Opticians to Prescribe Corrective Lenses

Ottawa - The Canadian Association of Optometrists (CAO) is calling for an urgent national dialogue on proposed regulations that would allow opticians in British Columbia to perform sight tests and prescribe corrective lenses. "This proposal is a radical departure from accepted eye care standards and is not in the public interest", said CAO President, Dr. Dorrie Morrow.

Dr. Morrow stated: "The government appears to be appeasing the economic interests of a small group of opticians and is proceeding with the change contrary to the advice from Medicine, Optometry and others in the eye care sector".

Currently, Canadian health regulations specify that a qualified doctor must be responsible for all optical prescriptions because a full eye examination is the only way to test for possible conditions such as cataracts, glaucoma or detached retinas, to name a few. This is critical because sight-testing equipment used by opticians cannot detect any of these serious health risks. Opticians are not doctors; rather their training is in the technical aspects of dispensing eyeglasses.

CAO takes exception to the view of the Honourable George Abbott, B.C. Minister of Health that there is no evidence that shows that automated sight testing is in any way harmful or inaccurate. According to CAO President, Dr. Morrow, "simply put, eye examinations should not be performed without an assessment of eye health, which results in the timely diagnosis of eye disease and ocular complications related to systemic disease such as diabetes. The evidence is undisputed".

"As President of the Canadian Association of Optometrists, I know that there are few things as precious as our eye health", added Dr. Morrow. "We need a collaborative process, rather than an arbitrary and confrontational approach.

The national Health Accord agreed to by the Premiers and Prime Minister established a 10-year plan that clearly committed to collaboration on primary health care. Eye health (in particular, "sight restoration") is identified as a critical national priority. It is premature and out of step with the federal-provincial agreement, which was signed by Premier Gordon Campbell, to proceed unilaterally with the BC-only sight testing initiative. It should be put on hold while scope of practice issues are addressed within the context of the Health Accord and the new 10-year agreement.

Dr. Morrow stated, "CAO is prepared to participate in a national review that could better rationalize eye care services, not only in British Columbia, but also throughout Canada". This review should commence as soon as possible and should be coordinated as part of the follow up to the historic provincial-federal agreement.

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