



Proposed changes to regulations in B.C. not in the public interest

Ottawa, March 24, 2010 – The Canadian Association of Optometrists opposes amendments to regulations for optometrists and opticians announced by the provincial government of British Columbia on March 19, 2010. “If implemented as written, the health and safety of the public will be at serious risk”, warns Dr. Kirsten North, President, CAO. “We are asking the B.C. government to delay the implementation until such time as consultations have been held and a review of regulatory practices in other jurisdictions has been conducted”.

The changes protect the business interests of one Internet seller, rather than public safety. Health Services Minister Kevin Falcon cites a rationale for the changes is to keep an internet company that sells contact lenses and eyeglasses, Coastal Contacts, from moving to another jurisdiction. “Eye care is too important to be considered a commodity and regulated merely to suit the financial interests of one internet retailer”, says Dr. North.

The CAO recommends that a thorough study of the regulatory models in other jurisdictions is conducted. “We urge the government to consider other provinces, the federal government and their interests, as well as the regulatory models in place in the United States and the United Kingdom, adds Dr. North. “We believe much can be learned from such a review and a best practice approach be adopted”.

The proposed changes in BC would allow a consumer to purchase contact lenses on the internet indefinitely, without the protection of regular professional monitoring. A contact lens lies in direct contact with the eye. Dr. North states that “contact lenses must be properly prescribed, fitted and cared for. If not, serious eye damage and injury can result”.

The BC Government also intends to allow opticians to conduct independent sight testing. The Canadian Association of Optometrists opposes the lowering of eye health standards. If enacted, British Columbia as the first jurisdiction in Canada and the U.S. to permit independent sight testing as a new regulated service. The public requires a comprehensive level of preventive eye health care in order to address incidence of asymptomatic eye disease as well as the high cost to society resulting from vision loss. “Regular eye health exams must be conducted as some eye health conditions can go undetected without eye health exams”, states Dr. North.

The Canadian Association of Optometrists is concerned that neither the B. C. Association of Optometrists or the College of Optometrists of British Columbia, which is mandated to protect the public interest, were consulted about these new changes in the regulations. CAO shares the concerns of the BCAO and CDOBC that the province is not considering this matter as an eye health issue.

An optometrist as an independent primary health care provider who specializes in the examination, diagnosis, treatment, management and prevention of disease and disorders of the visual system, the eye and associated structures as well as the diagnosis of ocular manifestations of systemic conditions". The Canadian Association of Optometrists recommends that children have their eyes examined by six months, three years, before school entry and regularly thereafter. Adults 19 to 64 should have an eye exam every two years. People with diabetes or age 65 or older should have an exam at least once a year.

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Also see http://www.opto.ca/en/media/bc_regulations.html for additional information.