

April 8, 2010

Honourable Kevin Falcon
Minister of Health Services
Room 337, Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

Dear Minister Falcon:

We are writing to you to express our concern that the vision health of British Columbians may be at risk if the proposed changes to the Health Professions Act are approved.

What particularly concerns us is the fact that many British Columbians will no longer be getting regular eye examinations by an eye doctor (Optometrist or Ophthalmologist). As I am sure you are aware many eye diseases, most notably glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy, can be asymptomatic in their early stages. Patients can lose a significant amount of vision if the disease is not treated in its early stages. Once lost this vision cannot be recovered. Early treatment of these diseases very often can bring the disease under control and can thereby prevent further vision loss. CNIB can attest to the fact that many of our clients had lost vision irretrievably as a result of ignoring the need for regular eye examinations.

The Canadian Ophthalmological Society established a committee to review the available evidence and as a result came up with a schedule for regular eye exams based on the evidence. This schedule can be accessed at the following link:

http://eyesite.ca/english/program-and-services/policy-statements-guidelines/Patients-periodic-eye-exam_e.pdf

Clearly the frequency of eye exams recommended based on the evidence of a number of experts in this arena is significantly greater than that recommended in your draft legislation.

Furthermore, many eye diseases are detected by eye doctors when conducting a regular eye examination associated with a refraction. This ability to detect eye disease will be lost if autorefractors replace regular refractions.

According to Statistics Canada about 4700 British Columbians lose their vision every year. This number can only be expected to increase significantly if the frequency of eye examinations is decreased.

CNIB recently collaborated with the Canadian Ophthalmological Society to assess the cost of vision loss in Canada. According to our study, vision loss currently costs British Columbians in excess of \$2.1 billion in direct health costs, as well as indirect costs, mostly those associated with lost productivity and associated loss of taxation revenue.

From an economic perspective alone, we would project that the draft legislation will result in a significant additional burden to the B.C. economy. We are concerned that a short-term economic decision by your government to save jobs, may come at a very high price, both in terms of health and economic costs to British Columbians. Statistics Canada also reports that just 35 per cent of working-age adults are employed, and a recent study conducted by CNIB found that almost half of adults with vision loss reported gross annual incomes of \$20,000 or less.

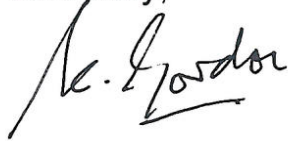
Vision loss also has a number of direct health-related consequences. People who are blind or partially sighted have twice the risk of sustaining a serious fall, triple the risk of depression and quadruple the risk of incurring a hip fracture.

The CNIB study also estimated that 75 percent of vision loss can be prevented through prevention, early detection and treatment. The best form of prevention is early detection. We are particularly concerned that the benefit of early treatment will be lost as a result of this legislation.

We urge you to make the necessary changes to this legislation before it is too late to save the sight of many British Columbians.

We would welcome the opportunity to have a dialogue about this and other vision health related matters at your earliest convenience.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "K. D. Gordon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "K" and a long, sweeping underline.

Keith D. Gordon Ph.D.
Vice President
Research and Service Quality

cc: The Hon. Gordon Campbell
Premier

Mr. Daryl Beckett
Director Professional Regulation
Ministry of Health Services