



CAO Position Statement on Internet Dispensing

The Policy Issue

Vision is the most important of all human senses. The public expects that their vision appliances (eye glasses and contact lenses) will provide them with the best vision possible. They also expect that a qualified and regulated professional will assure that they receive optimum care. Moreover, provincial regulatory authorities require that Doctors of Optometry are accountable and meet standards of care.

An evidenced based review conducted by the Health Professions Regulatory Advisory Council in Ontario¹ determined that the dispensing of eye wear should remain a regulated act. The decision to recommend continued regulation was based on the fact that there is a risk of harm from the unregulated sale of contact lenses and eye glasses.

Unregulated internet eye wear suppliers continue to entice consumers in Canada to purchase eyeglasses and contact lenses online without the benefit of quality assurance and accountability. The public is generally unaware that these providers are unregulated. Not only does unregulated eye wear dispensing expose the public to the risk of substandard care, but it also presents a verification challenge for third party payers.

Current problems associated with unregulated internet selling of prescription eyewear include the lack of prescription verification, the self-prescribing of contact lens brands and prescription strengths, pupillary distance and segment height measurements are self-administered and eye glasses are not properly adjusted.

Policy Position

CAO supports the regulation of internet dispensing to ensure the safety and accuracy of eye glasses and contact lenses. The public interest is best served and protected through a controlled environment for the purchase of online prescription eyewear. CAO proposes that internet eyewear dispensing must comply with the following principles of optometric dispensing:

- Patient safety
- Professional accountability and discretion
- Assurance of optimal appliance efficacy
- Availability of continuing care

Further, the following 4 minimum requirements of dispensing will ensure that eye glasses and contact lenses are provided as prescribed and achieve optimal performance.

- A current and valid prescription for eye glasses secured from an optometrist or physician
- Accurate and appropriate frame and/or lens measurements are assured by a regulated eye care professional

- Eyeglasses are verified, fitted and adjusted personally to the patient by a regulated eye care professional
- A current and valid contact lens prescription prepared by an authorized, regulated eye care professional

The continued regulation of eyewear dispensing is necessary to ensure the best possible vision care for the public. CAO recognizes that consumers anticipate the highest standard of eye care from their Doctors of Optometry and that convenience is an important aspect of that care. Since unregulated dispensing compromises patient care, only regulated eye care professionals should dispense eye glasses and contact lenses through the internet.

-Reviewed: July 10, 2014

References:

1. Health Professionals Regulatory Advisory Council (HPRAC), Interprofessional Collaboration Among Eye Care Health Professionals. March 2010 <http://www.hprac.org/en/reports/archivedreports.asp>