



COLLEGE OF OPTOMETRISTS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

TELEOPTOMETRY POLICY

PREAMBLE AND DEFINITION

This document is a standard of the Board of the College of Optometrists of British Columbia (*the "College"*).

This Policy uses the following definitions:

Teleoptometry: the provision of vision and eye health services within the scope of practice of optometry which are delivered remotely via information and communication technologies.

Remotely: the absence of physical contact between the provider and patient because they are separated by remote distance.

ROLE OF THE COLLEGE

The role of the College is to regulate registrants rather than the technology used in the practice of optometry. The use of information and communication technologies to deliver optometric services does not alter the ethical, professional and legal requirements imposed on registrants to provide competent, ethical, and appropriate optometric care.

REQUIREMENTS

The requirements for treating patients via teleoptometry vary by jurisdiction. Registrants who provide teleoptometry must be aware of, and comply with, the registration requirements in British Columbia as well as the requirements in the jurisdiction in which the patient is located. The College in British Columbia as well as regulators in some of the other jurisdictions require optometrists to hold registration in the jurisdiction in which the patient is physically located in order to provide treatment.

Optometrists who provide optometric services to patients in British Columbia must be registered with the College. The College exercises *in personam* jurisdiction over its registrants which means that it may investigate the conduct of a registrant in any jurisdiction regardless of where the optometric services were provided or the patient is located.

In providing teleoptometry services, registrants must:

- (a) ensure they have sufficient training and competency to manage patients competently through teleoptometry;
- (b) comply with the ethical and legal requirements to obtain valid informed consent from the patient recognizing that consent is a dynamic process;
- (c) ensure at the outset that their identity, location and licensure status (including any limits or conditions on registration) are communicated to the patient, and the identity of the patient is confirmed and recorded at each consultation;
- (d) ensure that the identities of all other participants involved in the teleoptometry encounter are disclosed to, and approved, by the patient in advance of receiving services and documented in the patient record;
- (e) ensure that both the optometrist-site and the patient-site are using appropriate technology that complies with legal requirements regarding privacy and security;
- (f) consider whether the teleoptometry medium affords adequate assessment of the presenting problem, and if it does not, arrange for a timely in-person assessment;
- (g) explain the appropriateness, limitations, and privacy issues related to teleoptometry to the patient;

- (h) provide an appropriate optometric assessment based on the current symptoms or condition, past history, medications and limited examination as possible;
- (i) create and maintain optometric records of the examination, in accordance with professional and legal requirements;
- (j) ensure patients have enduring access to their optometric records and that optometric records are available to other health care professionals for the provision of ongoing patient care;
- (k) ensure adherence to the same obligations for patient follow up in teleoptometry as is expected with in-person examination;
- (l) communicate with referring and other treating healthcare providers, and provide follow-up care as appropriate;
- (m) ensure patients referred to specialists are adequately assessed and treated before referral, and are advised about accessing further optometric care following specialist assessment and treatment; and
- (n) exercise caution when providing prescriptions or other treatment recommendations to patients whom have not been personally examined.

ADDITIONAL ISSUES TO CONSIDER

Registrants should advise patients that accessing optometric care remotely from an optometrist who is not physically located, or registered to practice, in British Columbia may pose risks relating to licensure status and/or training, and that the College may not be able to assist them in the event of a complaint.

Registrants should also be aware that practising optometry through electronic communication and/or in different jurisdictions may adversely affect their professional liability insurance. Registrants must ensure that they maintain proper liability insurance in place to provide indemnity for malpractice and misconduct wherever the issues arise.

REFERENCES

Federation of Optometric Regulatory Authorities of Canada. FORAC/FAROC Policy on Teleoptometry (May 1, 2019)

College of Optometrists of British Columbia wishes to gratefully acknowledge the College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia – Telemedicine Practice Standard (Revised June 24, 2019). Found at: <https://www.cpsbc.ca/files/pdf/PSG-Telemedicine.pdf>.