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**COLLEGE of OPTICIANS
OF BRITISH COLUMBIA**
a B.C. Health Regulator

Upcoming Continuing Education Activity Events

Jan 2011

The [OBC: Opticians of British Columbia](#) association will be touring around BC in February. Worth **6 EC credits**, the OBC workshop will feature two courses:

1) **The Future of Opticianry** - What is YOUR vision? Your future? The future of the profession? You are living through a period of great opportunity and it only takes a little imagination and sweat equity to leverage the opportunity to move yourselves and your profession forward. (Speaker: Kim McEachern, OBC)

2) **Distinguish Yourself From The "Joe Next Door"** - What it means to be a Licensed Optician and how to communicate your profession to the public (Speaker: Connie Chong, COBC)

Attend by live webinar or at one of the following tour destinations:

- Feb 7, 2011 - **Abbotsford** (Best Western Regency Inn, 32110 Marshall Road, 6:30PM - 8:30PM)
- Feb 9, 2011 - **Prince George** (The Coast Inn of the North (Gleason Room), 770 Brunswick Street, 6:30PM - 8:30PM)
- Feb 16, 2011 - **Kelowna** (Manteo Resort (WFIII Room) 3762 Lakeshore Road, 6:30PM - 8:30PM)
- Feb 20, 2011 - **Victoria** (Comfort Hotel & Conference Centre (Topaz Room), 3020 Blanshard Street, 1:00PM - 3:00PM)
- Feb 20, 2011 - **Nanaimo** (Coast Bastion Inn (Ballroom), 11 Bastion Street, 6:00PM - 8:00PM)

Registration Fee: OBC/OAC member: \$35.00 or non-member: \$65.00

To download a registration form [click here](#).

[Email](#) or fax (1-604-677-6583) your registration to the OBC.

New Legislative Changes, New Opportunities

By Kim McEachern, OBC

3 Key Changes

Opticians in British Columbia continue to be regulated Health Professionals. The recent changes in BC have given opticians a scope of practice that goes beyond that of any other province of Canada. Fresh opportunities exist because of three pieces of new or changed legislation that were developed to increase consumer choice but at the same time set out new opportunities for

opticians as professionals.

Perhaps the [most important legislative change](#) for opticians is that the scope of practice of BC opticians has increased to allow them to determine a patient's correction of refractive error for use in dispensing eyeglasses or contact lenses. Opticians cannot begin the dispensing process without the results of refraction. As a consequence of the changes opticians now have the ability to compete for that refracting and dispensing business on a level playing field. This signals a promising future for the profession.

Previously, optometrists were able to employ opticians in optometric practices but the Bylaws of the College of Optometrists prevented opticians from employing optometrists in their optician practice. After years of representation to government by B.C. opticians the [optometric bylaws](#) have been changed to allow opticians to employ optometrists further leveling the playing field by giving opticians an additional way of offering on site refracting services.

The third legislative change requires optometrists to release a prescription to the client at the time of examination. Since Opticians regulation started in 1994, optician's have been required to release a prescription however the optometric regulations did not force optometrists to do the same. This inequality was remedied on May 1, 2010 with [strongly worded legislation](#) that makes it mandatory for a client to be given a prescription at the time of an eye health examination whether or not the client requests the prescription.

Together these three changes, although made by the government to enhance consumer choice, also provide an outstanding opportunity for opticians to thrive in the economy of tomorrow. The changes allow opticians to meet the challenges of competition with tools not available in other provinces.

With this increased scope of practice go increased responsibilities and obligations that do not exist in other provinces. Therefore, opticians moving to BC will be required to take additional training if they wish to perform refracting services.

Choose Your Business Model

Opticians can now choose from four business models:

- 1) They can continue to rely on the prescriptions from prescribers, because new legislation forces prescription release.
- 2) They can employ an optometrist in their practice.
- 3) They can refract prior to dispensing eyeglasses or contact lenses.
- 4) Or more importantly they can utilize all of these opportunities.

Seize the new opportunities presented by the 3 changes to legislation!

What Does It Mean To Be Certified? Licensed?

Professional legislation is not created to protect opticians. Opticians in British Columbia and all the other provinces of Canada are not now and never have been protected by regulation. Because in earlier times there were no alternatives to the services performed by opticians we came to assume that the possession of certification and a license gave us protection by preventing competition. Opticians are not alone in having come to have that misunderstanding.

Professional legislation is designed to protect the public - not the members of the profession. The optical health consumers in British Columbia have been protected by high standards of practice prior to the new changes in legislation and they continue to be protected. Certification of expertise and the licensing process guarantees that protection.

Certification ensures that only properly trained and certified professionals are able to say they are members of a specific profession. The use by qualified practitioners of a title protected through legislation, in our case "Optician", acts as a signal to the consumer informing them that only specific individuals have received specialized training and education and must meet ethical standards. No other person can use that title. The consumer who opts for the certified practitioner stands a better chance of receiving ethical and competent service. And if they do not receive that level of service, consumers have a remedy through the College complaints and investigation process.

A second method ensuring public protection is granting a license. Licensing is more restrictive than certification as it stops anyone other than qualified individuals who are licensed from performing an occupational service.

Certain services and products can be provided by either certified or non-certified persons. In these cases the consumer must be informed about the services that differentiate a certified from a non-certified professional and make their own choice. Certification relies on consumers to be informed on the services provided by a certified professional and to make their own choices of obtaining services from a certified or uncertified person. A licensing process is used when government has decided to offer no choice to consumers but to get the service from a licensed provider.

Opticians in BC are governed by both certification and licensure systems. **If you want to continue to call yourself an optician and continue to provide eyeglass dispensing and replacement contact lens services, in British Columbia you must be certified and registered with the College.**

Both refracting and fitting contact lenses are services that may only be provided by a licensed person. **Opticians in British Columbia who refract and/or fit contact lenses must be certified, licensed and registered with the College of Opticians of BC.**

Life Long Learning

"Continued learning", "continued competency", "continuing education" - or any name for life long learning - together with its partner "entry to practice certification" is the foundation of professional regulation. "Entry to practice certification" gets you into the profession. Continued learning allows you to remain in the profession.

The requirement on a professional to engage in "life long learning" is not a voluntary action. The

College of Opticians of British Columbia has always had [requirements for members to demonstrate continuing competency](#). Under the new regulation if an optician is a member of the College of Opticians of British Columbia he/she is still required to design and complete periodic continuing education pathways to enhance life long learning. The only difference is that now those who are certified to refract must reach into an expanded body of knowledge to demonstrate their competency.

While it is true that people voluntarily qualify themselves for entry to practice certification, once the commitment is made, the certification is achieved and the license is issued, continued learning is not optional.

Distinguish Yourself - Be a Licensed Optician



BC Opticians continue to thrive and understand the importance of professional licensure to differentiate themselves from unlicensed individuals. There are 1154 licensed opticians in British Columbia. Of these 834 are either contact lens fitters or refracting opticians and must continue to be licensed by the College if they provide those services. The balance, 318 opticians, must be certified by the College if they wish to refer to themselves as opticians thus differentiating themselves as practitioners who have received specialized training and education and are bound by ethical standards. **Continue differentiating yourself and be proud to be a Licensed Optician.**

Visit LicensedOptician.ca to learn how

Opticians Council of Canada iPod Contest Winner

In December, the [Opticians Council of Canada](#) (OCC) put on a contest for all BC opticians for the chance to win a new iPod nano. All contestants had to do was provide 3 reasons "*why someone would refer their mother to see you?*" The OCC wanted you to tell us what makes you valuable and special as an optician and why people should see you.

The OCC is proud to announce that the winner of the contest was **Megan Beatty**. Congratulations Megan! Her winning entry:

1. I'm an educated professional that is trained to know what are going to be [your mother's] best options.
2. I follow a code of ethics and maintain a high level of professionalism.
3. I can ensure that [your mother's] glasses are made properly and guarantee the product.