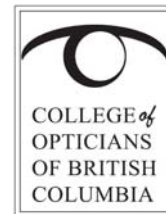


May 2008

vision matters

Highlights of the Board ~ College of Opticians of British Columbia



“SEE CLEARLY” BROCHURE

Enclosed is a sample of a brochure the College will be providing all optical stores. The purpose of the “To See Clearly” brochure is to clearly explain to your clients and the general public the role and obligations of a registered optician. After reading the brochure, your clients should understand that registered opticians fulfill an important job in protecting and enhancing their eyesight and trust that they will receive a high quality service from an accountable eye care professional.

COURT DECISION

The College of Opticians of British Columbia (COBC) is disappointed in the court’s decision by Judge Madame Justice Griffin, which denied the injunction to prevent the online sale of prescription contact lenses by unqualified persons.

Madam Justice Griffin’s ruling found simply selling prescription contact lenses is permissible by anyone (even in the absence of a written prescription). She found only when the seller intended to fit the lenses was it necessary that, in that circumstance only, they be fitted and dispensed by a contact lens fitter.

The Court also held that for refills of prescriptions, no fitting was necessary. This standard would appear to differ from that applicable to in-person sales in British Columbia. The COBC believes the same rules and standards should apply for the purchase of new or refill contacts lenses whether purchased in person or over the internet.

While the COBC respects the Court’s ruling, we believe that it reflects a

misinterpretation of the Opticians Regulation. The COBC believes that the purchase of prescription contact lenses online, whether for replacement lenses or otherwise, without the appropriate involvement, either directly or by way of supervision, of a qualified contact lens fitter, poses the potential for a risk of harm. This was demonstrated in the case, where, two online orders were entered wrong by the client but the contact lenses were still dispensed.

In fulfilling its mandate, as set out in the Health Professions Act, to serve and protect the public, the COBC feels it has an obligation to warn the public of dangers it perceives from filling or refilling their contact lens prescription over the internet.

The purchase of contact lenses does carry risks such as permanent harm to a client’s eyes, which is why their sale is regulated in British Columbia and is not available over-the-counter anywhere in Canada.

The COBC will take time to review the ruling to understand its wider implications and an appeal is likely. Further, the COBC may recommend to the government a change to the Opticians Regulation, if it believes such to be in the public’s interest.

WORKING TOGETHER

Registration Renewal is always an interesting time as it creates many questions from members, which then causes the administrative staff to pause and review the purposes professional regulation and the duties and objectives of the College. This makes it a great time to review the history and purpose of the Opticians Regulation.

Around 1993, the optician associations believed that trained competent opticians should be registered as health care professionals and be accountable for the quality of their work and professional relationships with the public of British Columbia.

In 1994, the government of British Columbia agreed and approved the Opticians Regulation which designated Opticianry as a regulated profession under the Health Professions Act and officially created the College of Opticians of BC as the regulatory body established to govern the practice of Opticianry in the public interest.

Standard of Care

The COBC ensures the public will receive an exceptional standard of care. The College does this by making sure applicants for registration have completed a rigorous training program and a comprehensive examination prior to their entry to practice and before they are able to use the special title “Optician”.

I am an Optician

The right to use the title “Optician” is carefully monitored by the College. It is a seal of approval that only specially trained people are able to use. It assures the public that people providing corrective eyewear are trained and accountable. Also, it ensures that you may proudly say “I am an Optician.”

Reality of Complaints

The reality is that few people can go through their professional lives without a complaint. What separates a professional optician from the rest, is the manner in which they handle a complaint.

(Continues on page 2)

A good optician listens to the complaint, discusses issues and determines a remedy.

Accountable

"Accountable" means that when things go wrong, as they sometimes do, the optician will fix the problem or otherwise remedy the situation. However, being accountable is difficult for some members.

The good news is the COBC has the authority to mediate complaints; if a member of the public cannot resolve a complaint by discussion with an Optician, they can ask the College to act on their behalf. The complaint process is easily understood and the COBC website fully explains the complaint process. Most complaints are resolved by discussion with the customer and the optician.

How Not to React

Occasionally the resolution procedure hits a brick wall, usually because the Optician is embarrassed to be on the receiving end of the complaint. Logic and civility are sometimes lost and like "Road Rage", it quickly escalates a simple situation. All the client wants is a really good pair of eyeglasses or contact lenses, and to have been treated professionally by certified "Opticians".

Trained Staff

The administration staff are trained to help both the public and opticians work their way through the complexities of a regulatory system. While they are empathetic to the concerns of member, they work within a narrowly defined set of rules. This is necessary to ensure that each member is treated equally, to ensure complaints are treated fairly and openly, and the system is transparent to the public of British Columbia.

At the end of the day, each "optician" is a member of a self regulating profession. There is no us-and-them relationship between the members and a College.

Optician members elect a board to govern on their behalf;

membership is by choice; you have determined that you want to be a "Registered Optician" and uphold the standards and ideals of the profession.

What Does the College Do for Me?

The title "Registered Optician" does not come cheaply. The College undertakes a series of costly but necessary steps to reassure the public of the expertise and accountability of an "Optician". At the completion of this detailed education, examination and continuing competence process, the COBC is able to reassure the public that "Registered Opticians" are highly trained competent professionals who are accountable for their actions.

You may want to refer to the COBC web site to understand how the College accomplishes this goal:
http://www.cobc.ca/Reg_Policy.aspx

Registration Fees

Registration Fees are a normal part of a self regulating profession. Legislation includes the payment of registration fees as one of the four key requirements for eligibility for registration.

Professionals know registration renewal is a requirement of continued practice in his/her chosen field - just as a drivers license renewal entitles you the privilege of driving a car or a passport renewal allows the privilege of travel without hindrance.

Each of these permits have one commonality: they reassure the public that the holder of the permit is unlikely to cause harm and further and they are accountable for their actions.

Towards the Future

The Board has determined that the public needs to be able to easily identify registered opticians. In the later half of 2008, the COBC will be joined with other provincial Colleges in Canada for the purpose of informing the public about the training and accountability of BC and Canadian opticians.

FROM THE BOARD ROOM

New Chairman

Congratulations to Kent Ashby (public member) for being elected as the new Chairman of the Board of Directors for the year 2008. We look forward to working with the new Chair.

Elections

Congratulations Brad Benson, representing District 4 (Cariboo/Northern BC) and Stephanie Weir, representing District 2 (Vancouver Island), for getting elected to be a member of the Board of Directors of the College!

In addition, we welcome June Barends (new public member) to the Board of Directors for the year 2008 - 2009. The Board looks forward to all your futures with the College.

Biographies of Board members can be found on the website at:
<http://www.cobc.ca/Board.aspx>

CHECK IT OUT

2007 Competition Bureau Report

The Competition Bureau recently released a report entitled, "Self-regulated professions: Balancing competition and regulation." The Competition Bureau is supportive of the College's rational and respected position regard optician's scope of practice. To review this report please visit: http://www.cobc.ca/Resource_Room.

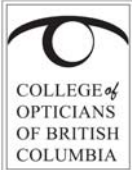
CALENDAR OF EVENTS

COBC Board Meetings:

- Sunday, June 8, 2008
- Sunday, September 21, 2008

Education Events:

- September 25-30, 2008 (Manchester, UK): International Opticians Association present

	COBC is committed to open communications and access with registrants and the public. For the most current updates and information about the Board and COBC, please visit www.cobc.ca .
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