

# VISION MATTERS



Protecting & Enhancing Your Eyesight is the Job of Opticians

## FEATURED ARTICLES

### What is an optician?

That is an interesting question, and one that opticians are often asked. The Opticians Association of Canada commissioned a polling company, IPSOS Reed, to complete a survey on the public perception of opticians. They posed this question:

*“A registered optician interprets your prescription for corrective eyeglasses or contact lenses, dispenses and fits eyewear, and is trained to make recommendations of the eyeglasses frame design best suited to your facial features. Given this description, would you agree or disagree with the following?”*

Nearly all British Columbians (90%) see opticians as trained and knowledgeable professionals. The majority (77%) say they will seek the advice of an optician for their next purchase. Three-quarters (75%) of people disagreed with the statement “opticians are only salespeople with no professional skill.”

Attitudes Towards Opticians	% Agree
An optician is a trained & knowledgeable professional	90%
I will seek advice of an optician for my next purchase	77%
Opticians are only salespeople with no professional skills	25%

So the challenge isn't so much to let the public know about the skills of the profession rather it is to remind opticians of all the skills and training they have.

To assist you and to inform your patients, the COBC published a brochure “To See Clearly” answering key points such as:

- Why Should I see a Registered Optician?
- What to Expect From Your Optician?
- How do I Check if My Optician is Registered?

Contact the College to request that some of these brochures be mailed to you. Further check the COBC web site for an updated informative description of opticians. The COBC material also caused updates to the Wikipedia definition of an “optician.” You may want to check out both web sites.

If you want to know more about how the public perceive opticians you can access the full IPSOS Reed survey at [www.licensedoptician.ca](http://www.licensedoptician.ca). Just register a profile to access the “opticians’ area” part of the site. The survey is in two parts, the first for British Columbia and the second for the whole of Canada. It is well worth the read.

### New College of Optometrists

The profession of optometry has now transitioned under the Health Professions Act; the College of Optometrists is now the regulatory body for all optometrists in the province, replacing the Board of Examiners in Optometry. As a self-regulating profession, the new College of Optometrists of B.C. will work in the public interest to ensure the optometry profession maintains a standard of care and accountability. The College's newly appointed board is made up of six professional members and three public members. To ease the transition process, most of the new appointees are former Board of Examiners in Optometry members.

### Inter-professional Collaborative Practice

Recent changes to the Health Professions Act make for an interesting read. The regulations require, as one of the many objectives of a college, that they promote and enhance inter-professional collaborative practice between its registrants and persons practising another health profession. The expectation of the government of BC is that Colleges and Health Professionals will work together to provide a high standard of care to the public. In the case of opticians this means that the COBC is expected to actively collaborate with other professions. As opticians, physicians and optometrists share overlapping scope of practice it stands to reason that these professions should be working more closely with each other. Based on the new legislation, it does not take much thought to realize that governments are tired of inter-professional banter. Colleges and registrants are charged with ensuring the highest standard of care for the consumer. Inter professional “turf wars” must stop and professions must ensure that the needs of the patients are placed above all others.

### Optometrist Regulations Require Prescription Release

All opticians should read the new regulations for optometrists. The new regulation includes the requirement that a copy of a prescription for eyeglasses must be given to a patient at the time of the examination. It must be free-of charge-and the prescription not state or imply that only an optometrist can dispense eyeglasses or contact lenses. If contact lenses are fitted using the prescription information, a copy of the contact lens specifications must also be given to the patient free of charge.

**The new optometry regulation requires a copy of a prescription for eyeglasses must be given to the patient at the time of examination free-of-charge and must not imply that only an optometrist or a person acting for an optometrist is authorized/qualified to dispense eyeglasses and contact lens.**

## Legally Speaking

The College has appealed a Supreme Court of British Columbia decision that related to the internet supply of contact lenses. The appeal was heard on May 9, 2009. The Appeals Court has not yet released their judgment.

BC College of Optics (BCCO) asked for a "judicial review" of the College policy on examinations. In short, BCCO believed that examinations should be set at a time and place convenient for the school. To ensure timely and cost effective examination processes the COBC opposed the application. At a hearing on April 1 & 2 2009, the BC College of Optics abandoned its case. As part of the consent to dismiss, the BCCO agreed to pay a proportion of the COBC costs.

In a more recent application the BCCO has petitioned the Supreme Court of BC courts for a judicial review of the process the COBC uses to maintain oversight of training programs for opticians. BCCO petitioned the Superior Court of British Columbia for a judicial review of the College actions concerning program approval and recognition. The BCCO sought interim relief prohibiting the College from requiring the BCCO program to undergo a periodic review. Further the BCCO seeks permanent relief from oversight by the College. The Court dismissed the BCCO petition for interim relief and further optioned that BCCO where unlikely to succeed in an application for permanent relief. BCCO's interim petition was dismissed with costs in the cause.

## BOARD ELECTION 2009

### Nominees

It's time for the COBC Board elections and this year you will be electing one registrant from the Okanagan/Kootenays (district 3) and/or one contact lens fitter (district 5).

The following opticians have been nominated for election:

- John Kerns (Okanagan/Kootenays) \*re-election
- Dialma Waite (Okanagan/Kootenays)
- Lutz Sprecher (Contact Lens Fitter) \*re-election
- Aly Jamal (Contact Lens Fitter)

You will receive all their election profiles either at the live-election in both districts or in the mail if you did not vote in-person. While all nominees come from diverse backgrounds and have multiple reasons wishing to be elected to the Board, they all share the same passion to continue ensuring that opticians continue to meet the vision care needs of all British Columbians.

### Live Election

The College is excited to announce for the first time ever it will be holding a live Board election for each district due for election.

- **Contact Lens Fitter (District 5):** The live election event to elect a contact lens fitter to the College Board will be held November 1, 2009 at 1:30PM during the AGM at the Delta Burnaby Hotel (4331 Dominion Street). Lutz Sprecher and Aly Jamal will each present their campaign speech and every registrant present will have the opportunity to submit an election ballot for their choice of candidate. Every registrant is eligible to vote for a contact lens fitter nominee.
- **Okanagan/Kootenays (District 3):** The live election to elect a nominee from the Okanagan/Kootenays will be held on October 20, 2009 at 6:30PM at the Sandman Hotel (2130 Harvey Avenue, Kelowna, BC) and October 21, 2009 at 6:30PM at the Ramada Inn (555 Columbia St. West, Kamloops, BC). John Kerns and Dialma Waite will each

present their campaign speech and only registrants that live in the Okanagan/Kootenays are eligible to vote.

We hope that everyone can make it to their district's live election event and hear each nominee's exciting new vision for regulating opticianry in BC and looking after the interests of the public. If you cannot make it to a live election event, an election ballot will be mailed to you and election polls will be open from November 30, 2009 to December 31, 2009.

## Vote in-person for the first time!

- **Contact Lens Fitter: Nov 1 at the AGM, 1:30 PM, Delta Burnaby Hotel (4331 Dominion St, Burnaby, BC)**
- **Okanagan/Kootenays: Oct 20, 6:30 PM, Sandman Hotel (2130 Harvey Ave, Kelowna, BC)**
- **Okanagan/Kootenays: Oct 21, 6:30PM, Ramada Inn (555 Columbia Street West, Kamloops, BC)**

## From the Boardroom

New Board members will have the opportunity to make a difference by applying their views, knowledge and expertise to help the Board make important decisions on important projects and regulatory issues. The following are some of the projects and issues the College is currently working on:

- **Technology upgrades** - the COBC received a grant from the Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development to develop and launch a project to improve the online assessment of international and out-of-province applicants.
- **Public education & outreach** - a national public awareness and professional identity strategy is being prepared to improve the public's understanding of opticians. The goal is to help the public understand the changes to the profession and understand emerging issues relevant to their eye care.
- **Online dispensing** - currently involved in legal proceedings with Coastal Contacts Inc. and Clearly Contacts Ltd. The COBC is appealing the decision of Madam Justice Griffin on an injunction to prohibit Coastal Contact Lens from selling contact lenses on the internet.
- **Labour mobility** - developing processes to identify qualified opticians and increase access to the profession
- **Automated refraction** - the provincial government has yet to amend the Opticians Regulation to enable Opticians to conduct automated refractions without the oversight of a prescriber. The College has ensured BC opticians continue to meet high standards by ensuring all opticians performing automated refraction complete an advanced training course and a certification examination.

## What It's Like To Be a COBC Board Member?

### By Lutz Sprecher

When you are first elected as a board member to the COBC, you will receive a notice to your first meeting at the College. It is really a Board orientation with only new Board members and the COBC lawyer. You are presented with a large white orientation binder containing Opticians regulations and the facts of life are explained to you - the COBC is a regulatory body working under the B.C. Health Professions Act and as a Board member you are now responsible to protect the public from harm. This responsibility

is so important that new board members now have to take an "Oath of Office."

Soon, the notice to your first board meeting arrives in your e-mail inbox with passwords to access the online board meeting agenda. Working your way through the agenda involves a few hours of reading and a familiarity of the background material. If you have questions about any issues, the COBC staff is an excellent resource of information, especially the Registrar, who has been personally involved in many of the regulations and organizations that exist today. All Board members are also assigned to a Committee and over the course of time; you will become familiar with all facets of the College.

As a Board member I experience a front row seat to the changes that are affecting B.C. opticians and as a voting member, have opportunities to effect change by participation in board debates and discussions. The opportunities for personal growth are many - the public members all have previous board experience and bring a wealth of outside knowledge to the table, the elected members all have their own viewpoints and come from businesses that run differently than yours. Even though you are technically working for the public there are many opportunities to support Opticians by working on issues that benefit both parties.

**"Experience a front row seat to the changes that are affecting B.C. opticians and as a voting member, have opportunities to effect change by your participation in board debates and discussions."**

### What's the difference between the College and an Association?

Simply, the College works for the interests of BC consumers while an association works for the interests of opticians. I bet you thought that when you vote for an optician to serve on the Board they would look after your interests. If you did you were wrong. The person you elected was presumably nominated because s/he had an excellent and respected reputation within the profession. Your expectations of the person elected are that you trust them to govern the profession fairly and impartially, but that they first and foremost look after the interests of the public.

Board members are required to take an "Oath of Office." The oath is worth reproducing in this article:

- *I will abide by the Health Professions Act and I will faithfully discharge the duties of the position, according to the best of my ability;*
- *I will act in accordance with the law and the public trust placed in me;*
- *I will act in the interests of the College as a whole;*
- *I will uphold the objects of the College and ensure that I am guided by the public interest in the performance of my duties;*
- *I have a duty to act honestly;*
- *I will declare any private interests relating to my public duties and take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest;*
- *I will ensure that other memberships, directorships, voluntary or paid positions or affiliations remain distinct from work*

*undertaken in the course of performing my duty as a board member;*

The oath makes it quite clear that an elected optician ceases to represent the interests of the profession and only works in the interests of the public of British Columbia. If this sounds unfair it should not be, your interests are represented by the association. You have an opportunity to either run for office or vote for the directors of the OBC: Opticians of British Columbia at the end of this month. You can expect the Board of the Association to act in your interest.

**The College works for the interests of BC consumers.**

**An association works for the interest of Opticians.**

### CONTINUING EDUCATION

#### Coffee Anyone?

Winnipeg is a great city for opticians; everyone knows each other and as a result often, will visit and socialize with each other during the business day. It is not at all unusual to pop in on a colleague and exchange war stories. How's business? What's the College up to now? You would not believe the last patient I had! What lenses would you recommend for this patient?

There is a great advantage to a professional community to be comfortable talking with your colleagues. Not only can you reassure yourself that you are normal, that is you haven't got three eyes and six legs, but by meeting each other you can form valuable networking relationships that will help you throughout your professional career. In fact, the College of Opticians even encourages group meetings to form a part of your continuing education program. Meeting for coffee to discuss new products, learning how to satisfy an impossible patient, and reviewing and discussing standards of care can all form part of your continuing education program.

Instead of a coffee club, call it a study group. Why don't you meet on regular occasions with a set agenda? By doing so, you can earn credits while you down your lattes. What's more important is you can do all of this for the price of a cup of coffee. Victoria, Prince George, Kamloops and Kelowna are all ideal cities for this networking - it's the right size of city to know each other and a great venue for informal meetings. Don't delay! Greet and meet another optician - it may change your professional life.

#### Updated Continuing Education Program

A year ago, the College invited all opticians in BC to an open meeting to discuss possible improvements to the Mandatory Continuing Education (MCE) Program. The meeting was amazing - all opticians that participated had really good ideas that generated positive and interesting discussions on producing better seminars, updating the credit system and the accountability of learning. Since then, the Quality Assurance Committee has reviewed all the great ideas and used some of them to update the MCE Program. Over the course of the next few years, changes to the updated MCE Program will be implemented.

The first batch of changes to be implemented:

- **Expiration for MCE activities:** courses will expire after 2 years to ensure content is still relevant

- **Categories of MCE:** instead of requiring dispensing opticians to obtain 15 EG credits and contact lens fitters 12 CL credits, the amount of credits required will be divided equally between the 3 major categories of opticianry practice: technology, health and business courses.
- **Increased carry-over credits:** the limit been increased from 2 EC credits to 1 years worth of credits (7 for dispensing opticians and 12 for contact lens fitters)
- **Graduated levels of education workshop:** allow education providers to develop beginner, intermediate and advanced levels of learning
- **Online testing:** allow education providers to test level of learning and encourage opticians to test their learning and earn more credits by following up each MCE activity with an online quiz
- Updated MCE requirements for international/out-of-province non-practicing registrants
- **MCE Education Planner:** help opticians plan a course of action to complete their MCE requirements by an agreed extended deadline.

The complete updated MCE program can be downloaded off the COBC website at: [www.cobc.ca/How\\_Are\\_Credits\\_Awarded.aspx](http://www.cobc.ca/How_Are_Credits_Awarded.aspx)

The College is also working on the issue of creating a resurgence of opticians truly interested in lifelong learning. Once again, the suggestions from opticians at the open meeting last year were innovative. Examples of these suggestions include:

- **Presenting relevant topics of current interest** - customer trouble-shooting, branding and marketing, higher calibre of technical courses, low vision and other emerging eye health issues
- **Create better presentations** - teach presenters how to make their presentations more engaging through improved communication skills and content
- **Group learning** - arrange meetings between groups of opticians to learn practical skills from each other (eg: sales techniques and how to communicate technical wording to patients)
- **Integrated lecture development** - encourage industry partners to work with the professional association to develop educational content

The College will forward all the suggestions from opticians to education providers in efforts to help them improve the overall quality of continuing education seminars. The goal is to develop fresh and exciting seminars to ensure opticians are learning, increase expectations for presentations, and increase the pride of opticians in their health professional license.

### What You Need and When

Now that you've read about the updated MCE program, you probably want to know how it will apply to you. All the changes will be implemented immediately and the College will take an active role in encouraging the professional providers to develop interesting and useful seminars.

The only change that will require a few years to implement is the updated categories of MCE to concentrate on well-rounded learning from the major categories of opticianry practice. Instead of requiring dispensing opticians to obtain 15 EG credits and contact lens fitters 12 CL credits, the amount of credits required will be divided equally between the 3 major categories of opticianry practice: technology, health and business courses. Therefore if you're a dispensing optician, you will require 7

technology, 7 health and 7 business credits each MCE cycle and if you're a contact lens fitter, you will require 12 technology, 12 health and 12 business credits each MCE cycle.

Registrants will upgrade to the new MCE requirements after their next round of MCE credits are due:

- **MCE cycle #3:** December 31, 2009
- **MCE cycle #1:** December 31, 2010
- **MCE cycle #2:** December 31, 2011

By December 31, 2011, all registrants will have upgraded to the new category requirements.

Updated MCE Requirements	
Total required credits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dispensing Opticians = 21</li> <li>• Contact Lens Fitter = 36</li> </ul>
MCE categories after upgrade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1/3 credits = Health</li> <li>• 1/3 credits = Technology</li> <li>• 1/3 credits = Business</li> </ul>
Education Provider	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2/3 credits = Professional Provider</li> <li>• 1/3 credits = Other Provider</li> </ul>
MCE cycle deadline & upgrade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>MCE cycle #3:</b> December 31, 2009</li> <li>• <b>MCE cycle #1:</b> December 31, 2010</li> <li>• <b>MCE cycle #2:</b> December 31, 2011</li> </ul>
Carry-over limit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dispensing Opticians = 7 credits</li> <li>• Contact Lens Fitter = 12 credits</li> </ul>

## Calendar of Events

### Continuing Education Events

- **OBC: Opticians of British Columbia Education Day & College Live Board Election:**
  - Tuesday, October 20, 2009 at the Sandman Hotel (2130 Harvey Avenue, Kelowna, BC) from 6:30PM - 8:30PM
  - Wednesday, October 21, 2009 at the Ramada Inn (555 Columbia St. West, Kamloops, BC) from 6:30PM-8:30PM
- **OBC: Opticians of British Columbia Education Day & College Live Board Election:** Sunday, November 1, 2009 at the Delta Burnaby Hotel (4331 Dominion Street, Burnaby, BC)

### COBC Board Meetings

- COBC AGM: Sunday, November 1, 2009
- Sunday, December 6, 2009
- Sunday, January 31, 2010

### Deadlines

- Continuing Education: Group #3 due December 31, 2009
- Board Elections: December 31, 2009