

ADVISORY NO. TOPR-4

Replaces Advisory TOPR-3

Date: June 22, 2016

**Subject: TERMINATING THE OPTOMETRIST - PATIENT
RELATIONSHIP**

One of the more interesting challenges in the professional career of any health care provider is finding the proper way to terminate a relationship with a patient.

An optometrist who terminates a relationship with a patient must have reasonable grounds for doing so. It is the opinion of the Alberta College of Optometrists that an optometrist may legally and ethically terminate the optometrist-patient relationship:

- a) As long as the patient is not acutely in need of immediate care and has been given reasonable notice to find another optometrist or ophthalmologist; or,
- b) On an immediate basis under extraordinary and limited circumstances.

Unilateral termination of the optometrist-patient relationship:

- Clearly communicate the decision for terminating the relationship (in writing) and document the reasons in the patient record.
- Give your patient a reasonable time period to find another optometrist or ophthalmologist.
- If possible, provide your patient with reasonable assistance to help them find another optometrist or ophthalmologist.
- Ensure that you have not terminated a relationship based on grounds such as age, gender, marital status, vision or medical condition, national or ethnic origin, physical or mental disability, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation or socio-economic status.
- Optometrists who limit their practice to a specific area of vision care (e.g. contact lenses) or a specific type of patient (e.g. geriatric) may terminate a relationship due to the specific limitations of their practice.
- After receiving written acceptance from the other practitioner to assume care of the patient; ensure that all parties understand that the custodianship of the patient file is now the responsibility of the practitioner who has accepted care of the patient.

Notwithstanding the above section, an optometrist may immediately discharge a patient from their practice if:

- The patient poses a safety risk to the office staff, other patients or the optometrist.
- The patient is abusive to the optometrist, staff or other patients.
- The patient fails to respect professional boundaries.
- The optometrist is leaving practice because of personal illness or other urgent circumstances.

Your patients should also be informed in advance if your personal morality or beliefs influences the recommendation or practice of any optometric procedure that may be required.