



ADVISORY NO. OPCLS – 5

[Please file in the ACO Practitioner binder in the “Advisories” Section - Replaces Advisory OPCLS-1, 2, 3 and 4]

Date: October 01, 2010

Subject: **OPTICAL PRESCRIPTIONS AND CONTACT LENS SPECIFICATIONS**

Release of Prescriptions

Optometrists may not charge for issuing or writing a pharmaceutical prescription, optical prescription or contact lens specifications (other than your usual and customary fee for an eye examination or contact lens fitting). This rule must be observed at all times:

- The time of the patient’s eye examination
- The patient’s contact lens fitting/follow-up
- Or any time thereafter

If a patient gives appropriate consent and requests a copy of their optical prescription or contact lens specification be sent by fax, mail or other means, regulated members (and their staff) are obligated to honour the patient’s choice. It would be considered unprofessional conduct for an optometrist to require a patient to return to their office to pick up a copy of their pharmaceutical prescription, optical prescription or contact lens specification if a patient requests it be sent by fax, mail or other means. Optometrists must also honour appropriately signed Release of Rx letters sent by other health care professionals or dispensaries and not require patients to redundantly sign their own.

Optical Prescriptions

According to Schedule 17, Section 5 of the Health Professions Act, a regulated member who prescribes an ophthalmic appliance or other visual aid must offer the patient a written copy of the optical prescription. An optical prescription is defined as the written record of the refractive error of the eye, including, if appropriate, reading add, prism and back vertex distance. Other optical prescription specifications may also be included on the written copy as per the professional discretion of the prescribing optometrist.

All addendums to an optical prescription should be based on reasonableness, accuracy and legitimacy. If a patient has not paid all the fees associated with the generation of an optical prescription, it is the opinion of the Alberta College of Optometrists (ACO) that the regulated member may withhold such information until all fees are paid.

Contact Lens Specifications

Since a contact lens fitting is not considered part of a regular eye examination, contact lens specifications can only be determined after performing additional specialized services following the completion of a regular eye examination. According to Section 5(3), Schedule 17 of the Health Professions Act, after completing all the services required to dispense contact lenses, regulated members must offer the patient a written copy of the specifications of the contact lenses.

If a patient has not paid all the fees associated with the generation of contact lens specifications, it is the opinion of the ACO that the regulated member may withhold such information until all fees are paid. For further information on contact lens fitting and specifications, please refer to the ACO Standards of Practice Guidelines 5.1.6 and 5.2.2.

Internet or Mail Order Eyeglasses

It is the opinion of the Alberta College of Optometrists that patients are able to fill their optical prescription at the provider of their choice.

The measurement of a patient's PD, fitting height for multifocals, selection and fitting of an appropriate frame, selection of an appropriate lens material and selection of an appropriate lens coating are considered part of the eyeglasses dispensing service and **not** part of a regular eye examination. Should one of your patients request any of these additional dispensing services, it is the opinion of the ACO that practitioners treat the provision of the service as any other non-insured service:

- a) Explain to the patient that the provision of these additional services are not part of a regular eye examination and your fee for providing the service(s) is at additional cost. Patient's have the opportunity of paying the fee and having the service performed or declining to pay and going elsewhere for the service.
- b) Explain to the patient that your office does not provide this non-insured service.

Verification of the accuracy and fit of eyeglasses purchased from another source should be treated as a non-insured service. Should your office choose to provide this service, patients are to be advised in advance of your fee for the service and given the opportunity to accept or decline provision of the service. The ACO does not support the use of expired prescriptions by any provider.

Internet or Mail Order Contact Lenses

Regulated members of the ACO possess the skill and competency to determine when all services required to dispense contact lenses have been completed. Neither they nor any other third party may dispense contact lenses until all these services have been completed.

It is the opinion of the ACO that upon completion of all services required to safely dispense contact lenses, it is incumbent on the regulated member to release the contact lens specifications if a patient wishes to purchase their contact lenses from any other source.

It is also the opinion of the ACO that all providers (internet, mail-order companies and other health care practitioners) only supply contact lenses to patients with a current contact lens specification. Accordingly, the ACO does not support the use of expired prescriptions by any provider.

Expiry Dates for Optical Prescriptions and Contact Lens Specifications

The Alberta College of Optometrists Guideline 5.1.6 states that all members must write the date of issue of the optical prescription or contact lens specifications, as well as the expiry date of the optical prescription or contact lens specifications, on the patient's prescription form. The expiration date for optical prescriptions and contact lens specifications is left to the professional discretion of the practitioner based on the medical and/or visual condition of the patient.

Expired optical prescriptions or contact lens specifications must be released to patients and/or other health care practitioners as historical data, but should not be used to fill a new prescription. For further information on optical prescriptions and contact lens specifications, please refer to the ACO Standards of Practice Guidelines 5.1.6 and 5.2.

Privacy Legislation

Privacy legislation dictates that any request for an optical prescription or contact lens specifications must be accompanied by appropriate patient consent.

Prescription Writing

All optical prescriptions and contact lens specifications must be written on a prescription form that includes the name, address and telephone number of the optometrist as well as the date of service. This form must be signed by the optometrist or stamped with the optometrist's name (or signature) and then initialed by office staff deemed competent by the regulated member to transcribe the optical prescription or contact lens specifications.

Complete Patient File Information

If a patient requests a copy of their complete office record, you may charge a reasonable fee for the retrieval, printing and mailing/faxing subject to the rules of the Health Information Act (HIA), Health Professions Act (HPA), Personal Information Protection Act (PIPA) and/or Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA).