



ADVISORY NO. P&M - 3

[Please file in your ACO Practitioner Manual in the “Advisories” Section. Replaces Advisory P&M – 2]

Date: January 1, 2008

Subject: PROMOTION AND MARKETING

Promotion and marketing of an optometric practice is governed by the Alberta College of Optometrists Code of Ethics. This advisory is intended to assist the regulated member in the determination of appropriate behavior when contemplating any promotion or marketing of his/her practice.

Generally, promotion and marketing by an optometrist or on behalf of an optometrist:

- [a] Must be clear, truthful, complete, and not misleading.
- [b] Must be dignified and in good taste.
- [c] Must not misrepresent the effectiveness of any procedure, instrument or ophthalmic device.
- [d] Must not claim superiority over any other optometrist.
- [e] Must not be detrimental to the best interest of the public.
- [f] Must not damage the integrity of the profession of Optometry.

Specifically, promotion and marketing by an optometrist or on behalf of an optometrist is governed as follows:

[a] Advertising Medium

Advertising and promotion is allowed via any form of communication equally available to all optometrists.

[b] **Specialist Designation**

The ACO does not allow regulated members to refer to themselves as specialists.

[c] **Advanced Training Designation**

The ACO believes that clear, dignified, and appropriate advertising by regulated members is in the public's best interest. If a regulated member has taken the extra time and effort required to achieve a designation beyond a Doctor of Optometry degree, the ACO believes that member should be able to refer and promote himself/herself as having "advanced training in.....". The following post-graduate programs are deemed appropriate in order for members to use the "advanced training in" designation:

- a] Accreditation Council on Optometric Education (ACOE) Accredited Residency Program. This program is typically one year of intensive clinical and didactic training in one specific area offered by many optometry and ophthalmology facilities.
- b] Diplomat of the American Academy of Optometry (AAO). This program has a pre-requisite of a fellowship (FAAO) designation. Completion of the diplomat designation then requires further case reports, written, oral and clinical tests. Ongoing maintenance (continuing education, research, patients care, etc.) is also required to preserve use of this designation.
- c] Other similar programs deemed appropriate by Council. To receive approval, a complete history of the program must be submitted to Council including, but not limited to: pre-requisites, length of program, date completed, location, list of instructors, clinical versus didactic hours, research conducted, published papers and posters, lectures given and number of patients examined.

The "advanced training" title is to be followed by the relevant description as given by the organization. For example, a residency trained optometrist in contact lenses would be described as "advanced training in contact lenses".

[d] Academic Designations

Academic degrees, fellowships, certificates and diplomas earned by examination from facilities accredited by the ACO are allowed to be stated.

It is considered appropriate to use either the designate “Dr.” in front of your name without any degree identified behind your name or you may list your name (without the Dr. title) followed by your appropriate degree(s). For example, your letterhead may read:

- [i] Dr. John Smith
- [ii] Dr. John Smith, Optometrist
- [iii] John Smith, B.Sc., O.D., F.A.A.O.

You may not list the name of the academic institution behind your degree, i.e. John Smith, B.Sc., Harvard University,
O.D., Queens College

[e] Membership

You may list your membership in various associations, societies and colleges as follows:

- [i] Dr. John Smith
Member of the AAO, ACO, CAO
- [ii] John Smith, B.Sc., O.D., F.A.A.O.
Member of the AAO, ACO, CAO

[f] Listing of Optometric Services

The ACO considers the listing of optometric services that are available at your practice to be a valid public service. The terminology used to describe these services should be consistent with generally accepted terms such as: Eye examinations, eye health examinations, complete vision and eye health examinations, eye surgery consultations, contact lens fittings, complete family vision care, treatment of eye disease, on-site optical lab, large selection of designer frames, walk-in appointments welcome, evening and weekend appointments available and compliant with ACO office infection control guidelines. Other similar terms would also be acceptable.

What are not acceptable are terms that denote superiority or that are misleading such as: Computerized vision testing, most advanced diagnostic, state-of-the-art, high-tech, sight saving eye exams, most up-to-date

vision testing equipment in the province, expert in all areas of vision care, most experienced vision care in town, gentle eye exams, scientifically proven vision care results guaranteed, voted the best office in consumer satisfaction and highest standard in infection control. Again, other similar terms would also not be acceptable.

[g] Endorsements

The ACO considers that provision of accurate product information by regulated members to their patients to be a valid public service. However, testimonials, comparatives, superlative statements or personal endorsements by optometrists or their patients are not acceptable.

The use of the “Consumers Choice Awards” logo and/or designation or any other similar wording from other companies is in contravention of the ACO Code of Ethics and the ACO Marketing and Promotion Advisory.

[h] Participation in Health Education and Charitable Organizations

The ACO encourages optometrists to participate in programs of health education and charitable activities offered to the public. However, regulated members should refrain from using this participation to expressly promote their practices. Optometrists are also allowed to list their name on the letterhead of health or charitable organizations along with appropriate designations.

[i] Practice Names of Regulated Members

The names of all regulated members who practice at a facility should be prominently displayed in a location where these names are visible to the public.

[j] Practice Trade Names

If a trade name is used, the names of the optometrists practicing at that facility should also be listed under the trade name along with the word Optometrist(s).

[k] Signage

The size and color of internal and external signs should be:

- [i] Compliant with your lease agreement.

[ii] The same or very similar to other signs in your surrounding area.

[iii] Of such a nature that your signage projects a professional image to the public.

[I] Fees

Advertising of fees must be complete, truthful, and not misleading. The advertising of free or discounted eye exams cannot be offered as an enticement, i.e. only if the patient agrees to purchase some other commodity in the optometrist's office. If a free or discounted eye exam, free anti-scratch coating, etc. is offered, these services and materials must also be offered to all patients regardless of their knowledge of the particular promotion or who purchase some other commodity.

The use of "bait-and-switch" advertising tactics are strictly prohibited. Patients are to be informed of any fees for examination or treatment services in advance of that service being initiated.

The ACO strongly encourages all regulated members who wish to get an advance opinion on whether their promotion and marketing material would be deemed acceptable to send a copy to the ACO office. The Registrar will respond as quickly as possible. E-mail (registrar@collegeofoptometrists.ab.ca) or FAX (780)466-5969 are the preferred methods of communication.