

CONTINUING COMPETENCE PROGRAM



ALBERTA college
of OPTOMETRISTS

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Mandate of the Alberta Health Professions Act

The profession of optometry is a regulated profession under the Province of Alberta Health Professions Act and must comply with Chapter H 7, Part 3, titled “Continuing Competence and Practice Visits”.

This chapter describes the process under which all regulated professions must operate and, in part, describes the purpose of the Continuing Competence Program as follows:

“...must provide for regulated members to maintain competence and to enhance the provision of professional services...”

“...provide for practice visits of the regulated members.”

The Health Professions Act, under Schedule 17, Section 9 (2 a), directs that the existing Practice Review Board under the Optometry Professions Act, be replaced by the “Competence Committee”.

The Alberta College of Optometrists defines Competence as having the right skills to perform the right procedure, for the right person, at the right time.

Alberta College of Optometrists (ACO) Standards of Practice and Guidelines

As a precondition to becoming a regulated member of the Alberta College of Optometrists, an optometrist must have already met the required registration competencies and be competent to practice in accordance with the Standards of Practice.

The Registration Committee of the Alberta College of Optometrists determines the licensure standards for the profession of Optometry in the Province of Alberta.

The Alberta College of Optometrists determines the Code of Ethics and the Standards of Practice, which are then published as a general description of the fundamental professional activities undertaken by an optometrist in the provision of optometric services.

The Standards of Practice are divided into three skill categories and provide the basis by which a regulated member's competency may be measured.

The Alberta College of Optometrists also publishes Guidelines, which more specifically describe the expected actions to be taken by a member when complying with the fundamentals of the Standards of Practice.

The Standards of Practice and Guidelines are reviewed and revised on a regular basis to reflect the evolving changes occurring within the profession.

Purpose, Criteria & Goal of the Continuing Competence Program

The ***purpose*** of the Alberta College of Optometrist's Continuing Competence Program is:

- To enhance and assess the knowledge, skill and judgment of practicing optometrists;
- To ensure each practitioner meets the prevailing Standards of Practice required to provide appropriate vision care to each patient, in accordance with the Health Professions Act; and
- To set an expectation that each member will practice according to the Profession's Code of Ethics.

The program is designed to work within the following ***criteria***:

- To be honest and fair;
- To be accountable, and measurable;
- To be flexible, and non threatening; and
- To be educational, and contemporary.

The ***goal*** is that every optometrist will:

- Maintain the skills he/she needs to provide service to the public;
- Continually enhance the quality of his/her practice; and
- Ensure his/her continuing educational development.

Participation and Administration

Participation by each member is compulsory and the review process must be accountable, confidential and transparent.

The frequency of reviews will be periodic for the Self-Assessment and once every five years for the on-site Practice Visit.

New members will be assessed in their first year of practice in Alberta.

The Competence Committee of the Alberta College of Optometrists is responsible for the administration of the Continuing Competence Program, including the member practice visit, measuring the results, making recommendations to the ACO Council, providing feedback to the member and administering an appeal process.

The Competence Committee is entirely funded by a portion of the annual membership fees collected by the ACO. It is also required to provide suggestions to the ACO Council for ongoing improvements to the overall program.

Methods used in the administration of the Continuing Competence Program may include:

- Written and oral questionnaires;
- Reviewer consultation;
- Patient record evaluation;
- Observation of techniques;
- Case presentations;
- Continuing education;
- Written examinations;
- Practice facility appearance and instrumentation;
- Any other tools that may be recommended by the Competence Committee.

Categories of Skills

The Continuing Competence Program is defined and measured through three skill categories:

1. Clinical Skills
2. Practice Management Skills, and
3. Communication Skills

1. Clinical Skills

The Clinical Skills category operates on the basis of a ‘problem orientated’ patient examination. The basic premise of this type of examination is the understanding that the patient has the right to assume an optometrist will perform any reasonable test, with the patient’s consent, in order to detect eye disorders or diseases. It is not the patient’s responsibility to request a test, but it is the optometrist’s obligation to perform all necessary procedures.

Standards of Practice describe the fundamental behavior for each of the following sub-categories of the Clinical Skills category:

- Professional Clinical Responsibilities
- Patient History
- Patient Examination
- Diagnosis
- Patient Management

2. Practice Management Skills

The utilization of practice management skills is measured in this category. Management skills to be measured may include, but are not limited to, participation in practice management seminars for both the member and ancillary personnel, efficient use of office staff and systems, investment in appropriate ophthalmic instrumentation in a suitable practice facility, appropriate use of time management and appropriate billing procedures.

Categories of Skills (continued...)

3. Communications Skills

The ability to communicate verbally, in writing or in any other appropriate manner with other professionals, ancillary personnel, patients and the public is assessed in this skill category.

In order to assess a member's verbal skills a reviewer conducting a practice visit will ask the member to describe, as some of the essential elements, testing procedures, diagnosis, prognosis, and treatment choices.

Legible charts and prescriptions along with concise referral reports to other professionals comprise some of the essential written elements of communication.

Modes of Assessment

Competency skills are assessed using three modalities:

1. Self-Assessment
2. Practice Visits
3. Continuing Education

1. Self-Assessment

Self-assessment is an introspective exploration of personal development by each optometrist. The goal is to assist the member in identifying his/her strengths and weaknesses in the three Skill Categories.

Questionnaires

The Competence Committee will forward questionnaires to the member on a periodic basis which require compulsory completion and return. A member's responses will be kept confidential.

The Self-Assessment questionnaire will be updated regularly to ensure it continues to reflect contemporary optometric practice standards.

A multiple-choice option for each question will provide the basis upon which measurement of the results is achieved in the self-assessment questionnaire.

Self-Assessment Results and Recommendations

The member will receive the results and recommendations of the Competence Committee's assessment of a Self-Assessment Review within 90 days of the Committee's meeting to discuss the reviews.

When a member is given a recommendation for remediation, the Competence Committee will follow-up the recommendation to ensure that compliance was undertaken.

Modes of Assessment (continued...)

Recommendations that are not complied with may result in further mandated remediation, including, but not limited to, successful completion of a written exam, compulsory attendance at continuing education seminar sessions, restriction in the provision of certain skills, or referral to the Registrar for further review.

2. Practice Visits

On-site practice visits are an integral part of the Continuing Competence Program, with the primary goal of assessing clinical knowledge and skills demonstrated in the members' clinical setting.

Selection

All current members will be routinely visited approximately every five years according to a previously established selection sequence.

All newly registered members will be assessed within their first year of practice.

Pre-assessment Package - Notification of Review and Conflict of Interest

When a member's practice visit comes due, a reviewer will be assigned from the Competence Committee, and a Notification of Review will be forwarded to the member, including the name of the reviewer. The member will be given the opportunity to accept or reject the reviewer, based on any potential or perceived conflict of interest.

The final determination by the member, to accept or reject an assigned reviewer, should be based on whether or not there is a concern that the outcome of the review might be, or might appear to be, biased.

If utilized, a Conflict of Interest form must be returned to the College within 30 days of the Notification of Review being sent and prior to the actual review. If a member refuses the originally appointed reviewer, the chairman of the Competence Committee will designate another reviewer.

The member has no further opportunity to refuse this second reviewer and must accept the chairman's choice.

Reviewer's Package

Each reviewer will receive an assessment package for the assigned member, containing a copy of the Confirmation Letter of Notification and an on-site Chart Audit Assessment form to be completed for that member.

The reviewer will respect the confidentiality of any information reviewed whether it be patient personal information or any information concerning the practitioner, in accordance with the confidentiality rules of the Health Professions Act.

The reviewer will be required to utilize a scale of measurement in assessing each of the elements detailed on the Practice Visit Assessment form.

On-Site Practice Visit

The assigned reviewer will make arrangements with the member as to the practice location to be reviewed, and a time when the member will be least restricted in his/her ability to carry on his/her practice. This information will be conveyed to the ACO office, which will confirm the practice visit with a confirmation letter of notification. Any changes made to the date of the practice visit must be conveyed to the ACO office in order that a revised confirmation letter can be provided to the practitioner.

The Competence Committee reviewer will follow protocol as set out in the Reviewer's Package.

During the Review, the member may be requested to allow the Reviewer to:

- Complete chart audits;
- Enter and inspect any place where the member provides professional services;

Modes of Assessment (continued...)

- Interview a member about his professional services, observe the member providing professional services, providing the patient gives consent;
- Interview or survey patients, clients and coworkers of the member, about professional services;
- Review, examine and copy documents, including patient records, billing statements, appointment books and any other items that are owned or under the control of the member and are related to the provision of professional services by the member;
- Assess the safety and condition of equipment and other technology used by the member in the provision of professional services.

At the completion of the on-site practice visit, the member and the reviewer should discuss any concerns or objections about the methods used or information taken during the on-site review. These should be noted in writing at that time on the member's On-site Practice Visit Evaluation form.

Discussion regarding the members competence should not be undertaken during the on-site practice visit, as it is the Competence Committee as a whole which will make this determination.

Member Review and Recommendations for Remediation

- The results of the practice visit assessment will be tabulated and presented at a meeting of the Competence Committee.
- The member will be identified by a numerical identifier, allowing for anonymity during the assessment.
- The Competence Committee will determine the disposition of each reviewed member and make recommendations consistent with the results.
- The member undergoing the assessment will be advised of the Competence Committee's recommendations within 90 days of the practice visit.

- Be it that the goal of the Continuing Competence Program is to provide every member with tools to improve his/her existing level of competence, all members will be provided with reasonable remedial recommendations in areas that are deemed to be weak.
- A member who is deemed to fall below the expected competence standard will be advised as to compulsory remediation in the designated skill area. This may include re-assessment within a given time period, development of a learning program, attendance at continuing education seminars, or demonstration of a satisfactory level of skill to a Competence Committee member.
- Failure to comply with recommendations of the Competence Committee may result in further mandatory actions on the part of the practitioner, including successful completion of a written exam, attendance at a specified continuing education program, restrictions to their practice of optometry, or referral to the Registrar.

3. Continuing Education

Members will be required to accumulate no fewer than sixty credits of continuing education in a given three year period, beginning January 1 of the year following their registration with the College. A member who accumulates more than the required sixty credits in a given three year period will be allowed to carry over a maximum of twenty credits into his/her next three year period.

Continuing Education credits may be obtained in two categories:

1) Clinical Studies

Unlimited credits in this category may be obtained by attending any lecture or course sponsored by any accredited school of optometry in North America, or any provincial, national or state association or college of optometry.

A member attending any lecture or course offered at facilities other than those listed above requires prior approval from the ACO registrar. A description of the course is required, including topic, dates, hours of instruction, lecturer's name, sponsor and any other relevant details that would assist the registrar in his review of the request. Proof of attendance must be provided to the ACO registrar.

Four credits for CPR re-certification per three year time period will be allowed.

Six credits for the preparation of a lecture or publication of an article or case report in a refereed journal will be allowed per three-year period. The lecture, article or case report is to be targeted for an audience or readership at a post secondary education level. Notwithstanding of how frequently delivered or published, each lecture, article or case report can only be submitted once for credit. In order to have these credits approved an application must be made to the registrar in writing, and must include a copy of the lecture, article or case report.

Six credits will be allowed for attendance at product information lectures sponsored by optical related suppliers. Proof of attendance must be provided to the ACO registrar.

2) Practice Management

A maximum of twelve credits may be obtained in any given three-year period. Along with approved lectures, this category may include volunteer work on committees and councils of the Alberta Association of Optometrists, the Alberta College of Optometrists, the Canadian Association of Optometrists, and attendance at annual general meetings of these organizations. Members who volunteer to act as assessors/examiners for the Canadian Examiners in Optometry (CEO) or the Canadian Optometric Regulatory Authorities (CORA) may also submit to the registrar a request for credit.

Methods of Obtaining Continuing Educations Credits

During each given three-year period members may obtain credits in the following ways:

1) Conventional

This comprises the conventionally offered lecture and course programs described in the Clinical Studies category.

2) Self Directed

Members may apply for up to six credits for self-directed learning projects not assessed by examination or a third party. This might include study groups, reading sessions, and other non-traditional forms of continuing education. To qualify for these credits, a member must submit to the registrar an individual continuing education summary prior to the learning session. The summary should include the subject matter to be covered, the resources to be consulted, and the timeline for completion. Upon completion, the member must advise the registrar in writing in order to receive the credits.

3) Electronic

During each given three year period members may submit up to 30 hours of continuing education credits obtained through the electronic media (internet, CD/DVD ROM), provided the member submits to the registrar official proof of successful completion of the program. The registrar reserves the right to determine how many credits will be approved for each course, irrespective of the advertised credits offered.

Appeals

- A. Appeals can be addressed to the **Competence Committee Chairman** in the following situations:
1. A member perceives, or is aware of a conflict of interest with the assignment of a Competence Committee reviewer for the purpose of a practice visit. The member must file a “Conflict of Interest Form” and return it to the ACO office no later than 30 days after the Notification of Review form has been sent and before any review is conducted.
 2. If there is any disagreement with any of the findings of the Competence Committee, a member may submit, in writing, comments regarding the results of the assessment. The member has the choice of:
 - (a) appearing in person before the Competence Committee to appeal the assessment, thus giving up anonymity, or
 - (b) providing a written statement defending the basis of the appeal.

An Appeal must be submitted within 30 days of the mailing of the Competence Committee’s findings. The Competence Committee will set forth consideration of an appeal within 90 days of receipt of the appeal.

In the event that a member loses an appeal the costs of holding the appeal meeting of the Competence Committee will be borne by the member.

- B. Appeals will be heard by the **Council of the Alberta College of Optometrists** in the following situations:
1. To challenge the decision of the Competence Committee or Registrar regarding accreditation of continuing education credits. Appeals must be submitted in written form to the Alberta College of Optometrists no more than 30 days after written notification is sent regarding the credits being refused or revised.
 2. To challenge the manner in which a practice visit was conducted by a member of the Competence Committee. Appeals must be submitted in written form to the ACO, no more than 14 days from the date the practice visit was conducted.
 3. To challenge the decision of the Competence Committee upon completion of a Competence Review. Appeals must be submitted in written form to the ACO no more than 30 days after the date of written notification regarding the Competence Committee's disposition of that member's practice visit.

Measurement of Results

The Competence Committee will publish annual tabulations of the performance results of the membership as a whole. In this manner the success of the Continuing Competence Program will be constantly monitored and adjusted to provide for improvement where and when necessary.

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