

Personal Practitioner Perspective

With the possibility of fluctuating seasonal temperatures and daily interactions with a multitude of potentially infected patients looming ahead of us, it is incumbent that all practitioners, their families and staff take the necessary precautions to ensure a flu-free winter and maintain a safe and sanitary work environment. As we are all but mere mortals who face certain occupational health risks, please consider adopting the following precautions:

- a) Ensure that you and your staff practice proper hand-washing techniques. In fact, some offices have even built a hand-washing station for patients as they enter the office (antiseptic solutions and disposable towels).
- b) Ensure that you and your staff are up-to-date on your vaccinations - including your yearly flu shot.
- c) Ensure that you and your staff do not demonstrate the so-called "martyr personality". This is named after those individuals who come

to work sicker than any patient who has ever been in the office before - risking infecting all other staff and patients in the office just so they can say they have never missed a day of work in their life.

- d) Ensure that you and your staff continue to make proper life management decisions of eating a well-balanced diet, having proper daily water intake, getting adequate sleep, getting enough exercise, refraining from excessive alcohol intake, quitting smoking totally and watching your mental health and stress levels.
- e) Ensure that your janitorial staff is rigorous in wiping down all work surfaces, telephones and entry doors on a daily basis.
- f) Have each staff use their own designated telephone.
- g) Use a dishwasher to clean cups and dishes in your lunchroom rather than just rinsing off under a water tap.

ACO Council

Although e-mail is the preferred method of communication with Council members, you may also contact any member of Council by telephone.

Executive Committee

Dr. Gerry Leinweber, President
(403)346-1177
gerry@doctorseycare.ab.ca

Dr. Shane Keddie, Vice President
(780)468-2020
skeddie@telusplanet.net

Dr. Gary Wetmore, Past President
(780)871-5991
wetmoreg@gmail.com

Dr. Rod Huszar
(403)320-1144
huszar@visualef.com

Council

Dr. Mark Bourdeau
(403)256-0606
markbourdeau@gmail.com

Dr. Lori Jaffray
(403)912-0999
drlori@gmail.com

Dr. Scott Poxon
(780)875-1700
wspoxon@telus.net

Public Members

Mrs. Gayle Stevens-Guille
(780)430-7962
gestevens@shaw.ca

Mr. Gary Christopherson
(780)338-2000
gary@wispernet.ca

ACO Office
(780)466-5999
1-800-668-2694



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A Word from the President ... Gerry Leinweber, O.D.

It is a credit to all those optometrists who have served on the College Council and our many committees to consider, that in just fourteen years, your College has evolved to fulfil the legal mandate of being a self governing profession. The privilege society affords Optometry through the Health Professions Act (HPA) to be a self governing profession comes with onerous responsibilities.

ACO Council members are elected by regulated members. Members have understandably asked, "Just who is the College and Council responsible to?" The short answer is that the HPA obliges the ACO and its Council to "carry out its activities and govern its regulated members in a manner that protects and serves the public interest". Therefore, unlike a membership services organization, Council members must place their responsibilities to the "public interest" above all other accountabilities.

As the College is such a young organization, and yet has come a long way in a short time, I hope to open a dialogue with the membership about the issues your College must deal with, and report what I have learned in my time on Council.

When you get right down to it, what your College is entitled to do and what it must do for the Government and people of Alberta is as follows:

Your College is legally obliged by government to regulate optometrists in the provision of health services, particularly restricted activities. Optometrists are obliged to demonstrate their "competencies" [unique body of knowledge, attitudes, skills, and judgment].

The College and its Council members have three major areas of responsibility:

1. To register properly qualified optometrists upon entry to the profession in Alberta.

2. To renew optometrist's practice permits, provided they prove continued competency.
3. To investigate, and if necessary, discipline members who have engaged in what the HPA defines as "unprofessional conduct".

As we accomplish these responsibilities, we must continuously act to "protect the public's interest". Yet, there is no clear definition of what this term means. I will attempt to explore this concept in a future message.

Colleges must provide an annual report to government and respond to information requests. The provincial Office of the Ombudsman can review the College's processes and decisions, but can only recommend that these processes and decisions be re-visited.

My objectives as President of your College are to:

1. Guide Council further along the road to becoming a policy governance board.
2. Further clarify with optometrists and external stakeholders how our College protects and serves "the public interest".
3. Collaborate and co-operate within and outside our profession to ensure Albertans receive high quality eye care as determined by evidence-based research and adherence to our Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice.
4. Ensure our College has a solid vision for the future, defined in a strategic plan.
5. Ensure a succession plan for Council, its committees, the Registrar/CEO and staff.

I look forward to a productive year serving the profession.

1. Continuing Education

With the end of the three year competency period looming for some regulated members, I would like to remind everyone to check the ACO Continuing Education Advisory in your ACO blue binder for the various means by which you may accumulate continuing education credits. According to Section 15 of the Optometrists Profession Regulation, all regulated members must obtain 60 continuing education credits in their three year competency period.

In addition to the various ways of accumulating CE credits listed in the ACO blue binder, the Ontario College of Optometrists has a new distance education course called "Professional Boundaries". To access this course, go to www.collegeoptom.on.ca and click on 'College Communications' and then on 'Distance Education'. Their previous distance education course on "Professionalism and Professional Ethics" is still available for credit to those regulated members who have not already taken it.

2. CPR Guidelines

The revised North American "Guidelines for CPR and Emergency Cardiovascular Care" were released less than one year ago. I would advise all members to access this document and update their CPR knowledge base. The guidelines may be electronically downloaded at www.heartandstroke.ca or a paper copy purchased through Laerdal Canada at www.laerdal.ca.

3. Registration Deadline

According to Bylaw10.2, a completed application form for a practice permit renewal, p.c. renewal, and LLP permit renewal, along with the required permit fees must be received by the College by December 01. Renewal application forms and payments received after December 01 are automatically subject to a 10% penalty. If no application permits or payments are received by December 31, your practice permit, p.c. permit or LLP permit will not be renewed. In addition to not being able to practice, the ACO is obligated to inform the Department of Health & Wellness and the College of Pharmacists of your non-renewal.

Former regulated members who have ceased to be registered by reason of not renewing their registration are eligible for reinstatement by applying to the ACO Registration Committee and paying all permit fees, reinstatement fees and any other outstanding levy owing. Also note that since the entire reinstatement process may take several weeks, you are not allowed to practice until this process is complete and reinstatement is granted.

4. Passport Guarantor

In light of the new Government of Canada travel advisories, more and more optometrists are requested to act as guarantors for passport applications than ever before. Please note that you may not charge a fee for filling out a passport application as this task is considered a personal rather than a professional matter.

5. Registration Committee Report

The following is a summary of the spring and fall sittings of the ACO Jurisprudence Exam for new applicants. (Please note that the exact same exam was undertaken by both groups). Those applicants who were not successful in the fall sitting will be offered the opportunity to rewrite a different exam in the next few weeks.

	Spring Sitting	Fall Sitting
Number of applicants	20	6
Number of exam failures	0	4
Average mark	80.6%	70.6%
Median mark	82.0%	65.0%

6. Competence Committee Report

The next round of practice reviews will take place in the spring of 2007 and practitioners selected for a practice review will be notified by mail.

The Competence Committee is finalizing details of a major change in philosophy and administration of the Continuing Competence Program. All new practitioners to the province undergo a practice review within one year of registration and are subsequently scheduled for a practice review 4 years thereafter if the review was found to be satisfactory. If this second review is again found to be satisfactory, the member would then have his/her review scheduled to an 8 year rotation.

It is the Committee's desire to spend less time on those practitioners who continually perform exceptionally well review after review, and spend more time on those practitioners who require remediation. The rotation amendment would allow less frequent practice reviews for those practitioners who receive satisfactory reviews and more frequent practice reviews for those practitioners who continually do not receive satisfactory reviews.

It was felt that this new rotation was in the public's best interest, as reviews will be scheduled more frequently for those practitioners who require remediation. It was also in the Committee's best interest to not involve committee time and expense on practitioners who continually receive satisfactory reviews.

If you wish to comment on this change, please address your comments to the Chairman of the Competence Committee, Dr. Gary Watson, at garywat@telus.net.

7. Mandatory Registration

At the time of printing this newsletter the Opticians Profession Regulation has still not been proclaimed. Once the Regulation is proclaimed, any optician employed in your office who is qualified to meet the requirements of registration with the Alberta Opticians College or intends to provide professional services directly to the public or supervise regulated members who provide professional services to the public must register with the new Alberta Opticians College and pay their yearly dues.

8. AGM Highlights

The 14th Annual General Meeting of the Alberta College of Optometrists was held on September 30, 2006 at the Mayfield Inn & Suites Hotel in Edmonton. A total of 82 regulated members were in attendance.

In addition to receiving and approving the many reports already circulated in your AGM Report, those in attendance also approved the new Bylaws for the college. The new ACO Bylaws now mesh seamlessly with the Position Descriptions for our Registrar, CEO, Hearing Director and Complaints Director as well as the Terms of Reference for the many committees required by the HPA developed under our new governance policy. The membership also voted to keep the yearly dues the same as in previous years; however, they did vote in favor of a special \$200 new building levy to assist the college in moving to a new location.

The membership would like to extend their gratitude to Dr.'s Bruce Johnson and Bob DeMara for their many years of service on council. We would also like to extend a welcome to newly elected council members: Dr.'s Lori Jaffray and Scott Poxon.