

Three Key Changes

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Opticians in British Columbia continue to be regulated Health Professionals. The recent changes in BC have given opticians a scope of practice that goes beyond that of any other province of Canada. Fresh opportunities exist because of three pieces of new or changed legislation that were developed to increase consumer choice but at the same time set out new opportunities for opticians as professionals.

Perhaps the most important legislative change for opticians is that the scope of practice of BC opticians has increased to allow them to determine a patient's correction of refractive error for use in dispensing eyeglasses or contact lenses. Opticians cannot begin the dispensing process without the results of refraction. As a consequence of the changes

opticians now have the ability to compete for that refracting and dispensing business on a level playing field. This signals a promising future for the profession.

Previously, optometrists were able to employ opticians in optometric practices but the Bylaws of the College of Optometrists prevented opticians from employing optometrists in their optician practice. After years of representation to government by B.C. opticians the optometric bylaws have been changed to allow opticians to employ optometrists further leveling the playing field by giving opticians an additional way of offering on site refracting services.

The third legislative change requires optometrists to release a prescription to the client at the time of examination. Since Opticians regulation started in 1994, optician's have been required to release a prescription however the

optometric regulations did not force optometrists to do the same. This inequality was remedied on May 1, 2010 with strongly worded legislation that makes it mandatory for a client to be given a prescription at the time of an eye health examination whether or not the client requests the prescription.

Together these three changes, although made by the government to enhance consumer choice, also provide an outstanding opportunity for opticians to thrive in the economy of tomorrow. The changes allow opticians to meet the challenges of competition with tools not available in other provinces.

With this increased scope of practice go increased responsibilities and obligations that do not exist in other provinces. Therefore, opticians moving to BC will be required to take additional training if they wish to perform refracting services.

Choose Your Business Model

Opticians can now choose from four business models:

1. We can continue to rely on the prescriptions from prescribers, because new legislation forces prescription release;
2. We can employ an optometrist in their practice;
3. We can refract prior to dispensing eyeglasses or contact lenses; or
4. We can utilize all of these opportunities.

Because each of these changes in British Columbia have for many years formed part of the short and long term goals of the Opticians Association of Canada that organization can take great pride in the establishment of these new patterns for best practice. BC opticians proudly remain regulated. They are seizing the new opportunities presented by the 3



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These opportunities are unprecedented anywhere else in Canada. However, despite being in a period of great opportunity, I've heard some BC opticians say, "What does that optician's certificate

hanging on the wall mean any more? Why do I need it?" Well you don't need it unless:

- You want to call yourself an optician;
- You want to distinguish yourself as a trained and competent health professional;
- You want to provide a health care service your community can trust;
- You want to fit contact lenses;
- You want to refract within limitations;
- You want to refract without limitation with referral from a physician;
- You want to continue to have pride in belonging to a profession that has standards; and
- You want to be a member of a team that has commitment to excellence.

BC opticians proudly remain regulated. We should seize the new opportunities presented by the 3 changes to legislation and continue to differentiate themselves as vision care professionals!

What Does It Mean To Be Certified? Licensed?

Professional legislation is not created to protect opticians. Opticians in British Columbia and all the other provinces of Canada are not now and never have been protected by regulation. Because in earlier times there were no alternatives to the services performed by opticians we came to assume that the possession of certification and a license gave us protection by preventing competition. Opticians are not alone in having come to have that misunderstanding.

Professional legislation is actually designed to protect the public - not the members of the profession. The optical health consumers have been protected by high standards of practice prior to the new changes in legislation and they continue to be protected. Certification of expertise and the licensing process guarantees that protection.

Certification ensures that only properly trained and certified professionals are able to say they are members of a specific profession. The use by qualified practitioners of a title protected through

legislation, in our case "Optician," acts as a signal to the consumer informing them that only specific individuals have received specialized training and education and must meet ethical standards. No other person can use that title. When you say you are an optician, it serves as a guarantee to your customers that you have training, that you meet standards, that you are accountable to your profession and that they – the consumer – have a remedy through the College complaints and investigation process if they are not satisfied with your product and services. The government says to consumers, "You can take a chance and get your eyeglasses or contact lenses from an unregulated provider if you want. We can't legislate your purchasing decisions. But if you want a sure thing, see a regulated provider."

A second method ensuring public protection is granting a license. Licensing is more restrictive than certification as it stops anyone other than qualified individuals who are licensed from performing an occupational service.

Certain services and products can be provided by either certified or non-

certified persons. In these cases the consumer must be informed about the services that differentiate a certified from a non-certified professional and make their own choice. Certification relies on consumers to be informed on the services provided by a certified professional and to make their own choices of obtaining services from a certified or uncertified person. A licensing process is used when government has decided to offer no choice to consumers but to get the service from a licensed provider.

Opticians in BC are governed by both certification and licensure systems. If BC Opticians want to continue to calling themselves an optician and continue to provide eyeglass dispensing and replacement contact lens services, in British Columbia they must be certified and registered with the College.

Both refracting and fitting contact lenses are services that may only be provided by a licensed person. Opticians in British Columbia who refract and/or fit contact lenses must be certified, licensed and registered with the College of Opticians of BC.

Distinguish Yourself - Be a Licensed Optician

Our challenge right now – today - is to not only differentiate ourselves from those unregulated sellers of product like the Internet but to really distinguish ourselves. What's the difference between being different and being distinguished?

You can be different just by wearing a funny hat, by painting your dispensary walls fluorescent red, by stocking 10,000 eyeglass frames or by opening a dispensary on a boat in the harbour. But you are distinguished when you're recognized by virtue of your excellence, your dependability, your honour and your standards. You are distinguished when you're noted for your skill, knowledge or contribution.

Let's shape our primary education, our continuing education, our credentialing and our future towards being

distinguished. Let's innovate new business models to make the most of our professional assets.

BC Opticians continue to thrive and understand the importance of professional licensure to differentiate themselves from unlicensed individuals. There are 1154 licensed opticians in British Columbia. Of these 834 are either contact lens fitters or refracting opticians and must continue to be licensed by the College if they provide those services. The balance, 318 opticians, must be certified by the College if they wish to refer to themselves as opticians thus differentiating themselves as practitioners who have received specialized training and education and are bound by ethical standards.

I want to be on that distinguished team. I bet you do too. I am proud to be a Licensed Optician and I am excited for the future of our profession.



Let's shape our primary education, our continuing education, our credentialing and our future towards being distinguished. I am proud to be a Licensed Optician!

Upcoming Continuing Education Events:

- 1) **Feb 2011** - New Changes, New Opportunities Tour (Feb 7 Abbotsford | Feb 9 Prince George | Feb 16 Kelowna | Feb 20 Victoria | Feb 20 Nanaimo | or watch via live online webinar)
 - 2) **March 20, 2011** - Full Education Day (Douglas College, 700 Royal Avenue, New Westminster)
- To register, go to <http://www.opticians.bc.ca>