CODE OF PRACTICE - OPTOMETRY

PRODUCED BY THE COUNCIL FOR THE PROFESSIONS COMPLEMENTARY TO MEDICINE

April 2006

The aim of the Code of Professional Conduct for Optometrists is to provide a set of principles which guide optometrist to undertake their duties and responsibilities in a professional, ethical and moral manner.

Definition of Optometrists

Optometrists are trained to:

- Test sight and examine eyes for signs of ocular disease or abnormality,
- Prescribe spectacles and contact lenses,
- Fit spectacles or contact lenses and give advice on visual problems,
- Share with appropriate medical practitioners the care of patients who have chronic ophthalmic conditions.

Optometrists should:

1. Comply with the provisions of the Health Care Professions Act, 2003 (Cap. 464) and with other laws affecting the professions.

2. Comply with current infection control standards and if in doubt, an infection control officer should be consulted.

3. Be accountable for their work. Practitioners should recall that it is only from continuing education and training that the improvement and expansion of the scope of optometric services can result. This is the case in relation to ensuring that referrals made by optometrists operate in the best possible interests of patients.

4. Recognise the limits of their professional competence and in the interest of their patients, should only provide services and use techniques for which they are qualified by training and experience.

5. Take every opportunity to sustain and improve their knowledge and professional competence.

6. Be prepared to request additional training when they perceive this need.

7. Ensure that their professional responsibilities and standards of practice are not influenced by consideration of age, sexual preference, religion, sex, race, nationality, party politics, social or economic status or nature of a patient's health problems.

8. Refuse to accept any gifts, favour or hospitality that might be interpreted as seeking to exact undue influence to obtain professional treatment.

9. Avoid advertising or signing an advertisement using their professional qualifications to encourage the sale of commercial products.

10. Apply the greatest care whilst providing medical treatment to patients.

11. Have regard to the physical and physiological needs of patients and the effects on them of the hospital/clinic environment.

12. At all times act to promote and to safeguard the well-being and interests of patients for whose care they are professionally accountable and ensure that by no action or omission on their part the condition and safety of the patient is put at risk.

13. Hold in confidence any information obtained through professional attendance on a patient.

14. Comply with all applicable obligations as described in the data protection legislation.

15. Exercise their professional judgement as to how best their patients' needs can be met, in practice, when they observe a sign of injury, disease or abnormality which falls beyond their competence, for example;

a) In urgent cases, the patient must be sent to an ophthalmologist with a letter of referral,
b) In all cases, except those covered below, the patient and a letter of referral must be sent to a registered medical practitioner,
c) Exception to 14b is made when a patient is already under medical care in respect of the observed sign of disease or where, in the clinical opinion of the practitioner, the condition observed is such that it does not merit medical investigation but requires further monitoring. Such reasons must be stated clearly in the patient's record.

16. Send letters of Referral: The purpose of referral is to ensure that the patient's needs can be met as well and as quickly as possible. It is the duty of all optometrists to apply the full extent of their knowledge and skill to this end. Letters of referral by optometrists, must give as much factual information derived from the eye examination as possible, relevant to the particular patient and justifying the reason why a referral has been made, and may, where appropriate and if in the patient's interest include a possible diagnosis.

17. Ensure that the patient fully understands why referral is necessary. When signs of injury, disease or abnormality are observed and the patient refuses to accept a letter of referral, a full account of the matter should be included in the patient's records.

18. Take appropriate action of the work load and pressures on professional colleagues and subordinates are such as to endanger safe standards of practice.

It is highly recommended that every Optometrist carries out Continuing Professional Development.