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Federation of Optometric Regulatory Authorities of Canada
Fédération des autorités réglementaires optométriques du Canada

POSITION STATEMENT

REFRACTIONS, VISION AND EYE HEALTH EXAMINATIONS

The Federation of Optometric Regulatory Authorities of Canada (FORAC) believes that no government or organization should permit and/or promote the practice of performing a refraction[1], for the purposes of prescribing eyewear for vision correction that is not in conjunction with a comprehensive vision and eye health examination.

BACKGROUND

Good vision is directly related to both the physical health of the eyes and the normal functioning of the entire visual system. Also, several other key factors must be considered including: the general systemic health of the patient, eye or vision disorders in members of the family, medications taken, the type of work performed and the environment in which the patient lives and works.

COMPREHENSIVE VISION AND EYE HEALTH EXAMINATIONS

The essential components of a comprehensive eye examination conducted by an optometrist or ophthalmologist include:

- a thorough eye, general medical and family health history;
- eye health examinations;
- binocular vision assessment;
- colour vision testing;
- visual field testing; and
- investigations to determine potential manifestations, in the eye, of systemic disease.

In many cases, diagnostic drugs such as mydriatics and cycloplegics, are required in order to permit a more accurate refraction and thorough assessment of internal and external eye health.

Optometrists and ophthalmologists are required by their respective professional standards of practice to rule out eye or systemic disease before prescribing lenses for vision correction. It is understood, for example, that uncontrolled diabetes will alter a patient's refraction from day to day or even hour to hour. Any attempt to prescribe corrective lenses, without first ensuring that a patient with diabetes is medically stable, may result in both a faulty prescription and delayed medical treatment.

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[1] Refraction is the process used to establish a patient's refractive error. Refractive error is a problem with focusing light accurately onto the retina due to the shape of the eye. The most common types of refractive error are nearsightedness, farsightedness, astigmatism and presbyopia. Eyewear, including eyeglasses or contact lenses, may be prescribed to correct a patient's refractive error to achieve optimal vision.

Furthermore, previously undiagnosed cases of diabetes, glaucoma, and systemic hypertension are frequently discovered during comprehensive vison and eye health examinations. Changes, that are only visible within the eye, alert the optometrist or ophthalmologist of eye and/or systemic diseases, which must first be considered before prescribing corrective lenses. For these reasons, a prescription for vision correction should only be determined after a comprehensive vision and eye health examination has been provided by an optometrist or ophthalmologist who has personally assessed the patient.

CONCLUSION

Not all eye or systemic diseases affect vision; studies have shown that using visual acuity measurements alone, as a referral criterion for comprehensive vision and eye health examination, are inappropriate *(see References 1, 2, and 3.)* A sight test or web-based refraction does not embrace the concept of the optometrist or ophthalmologist being physically present to rule out eye or systemic diseases.

Accordingly, FORAC believes that the general public is at risk of having potentially sight-threatening or even life-threatening diseases remaining in an undiagnosed and untreated state, regardless of who actually signs the prescription. As such, no government or organization should permit and/or promote the practice of performing a refraction, for the purposes of prescribing eyewear for vision correction, that is not in conjunction with a comprehensive vision and eye health examination.

REFERENCES

1. Wang F, et al. *Undetected Eye Disease in a Primary Care Clinic Population*. Archives of Internal Medicine 1994: 154: 1821-1828.
2. Michaud L, Forcier P. *Prevalence of asymptomatic ocular conditions in subjects with refractive-based symptoms.* J Optom. 2014;7(3):153-160.
3. Dobbelsteyn D, McKee K, Bearnes RD, Jayanetti SN, Persaud DD, Cruess AF. *What percentage of patients presenting for routine eye examinations require referral for secondary care? A study of referrals from optometrists to ophthalmologists.* Clin Exp Optom. 2015;98(3):214-217.
4. Irving EL, Harris JD, Machan CM, et al. *Value of routine eye examinations in asymptomatic patients. Optom Vis Sci.* 2016; 93(7):660-666.

The Federation of Optometric Regulatory Authorities of Canada position statement address the risk of harm to the public that is posed when a refraction, for the purposes of prescribing eyewear for vision correction, is not performed in conjunction with a comprehensive vision and eye health examination. These refractions may take the form of sight testing and web (app) based refractions.

FORAC is the Federation of Canadian optometric regulatory and licensing bodies dedicated to facilitating discussion, exchanging information, providing a national voice with others about issues related to the health care system that includes the profession of the optometry and protection of the public.

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