

Subject: Optometrist Opinion
 Date: Wednesday, 2 March 2011 11:37:21 AM

To the Optometrist Board of Australia,

Please take into consideration my thoughts on this matter.

1. Is there any public benefit in requiring all optometrists to be eligible for therapeutic endorsement?

There is definitely a public benefit to all optometrists being therapeutically trained, however the public needs to be made aware via advertising of the profession if this is to be the case. Currently most of our patients still believe our capabilities are limited to supplying spectacles and contact lenses.

2. Is such a requirement a reasonable expectation of optometrists?

Whilst the expectation is reasonable the current course offered is expensive, extremely intensive and not really possible for all practicing optometrists to complete.

3. Should therapeutic qualifications be a requirement for practice as an optometrist in Australia?

I think it would be possible to run a two tier system, as we are currently doing in our group practice, where patients can be referred to therapeutically qualified colleagues if the requirement arises.

4. If so, should there be a period of grace to allow all registered optometrists to gain the necessary qualifications and how long should the period be?

There should be a period of grace of 10-15 years.

5. To be consistent with Australian graduates, should overseas-trained optometrists applying for general registration in Australia for the first time be required to complete appropriate competency assessments for therapeutic practice from 2014?

They should be required to have competency standard equivalent to the current workforce, making it a full requirement if it is to become a full requirement for all optometrists.

6. Should optometrists holding general registration practising in non-clinical roles, such as management, administration, education, research, advisory, regulatory or policy development roles, be required to hold therapeutic qualifications?

I feel this should probably be a decision made by the employment body at the time. I cannot see a risk to the general public of someone not being therapeutically qualified if they hold a non-clinical role.

7. Are there impediments to the proposal that need to be and if so, can these be overcome?

The impediments are twofold.

Firstly the current therapeutics course offered (in Victoria, anyway) is not really appropriate for people such as myself (and I am imagining many people needing to complete the course are in a similar age group and position to myself.) I have three small children and am part owner in a group practice. Whilst my partners would love to see me therapeutically trained, they also need me to be working in the business. When entering into the decision to be a partner in the business, and to have children, I was aware that there would always be the requirement to keep myself up to date and qualified. The current continuing education scheme is fair and possible as there is a variety of ways that the criteria can be met. The therapeutics course is not however at all conducive to running a business or having a family.

If the course could be offered on a part time basis, or over an extended period to give people, such as myself time to plan ahead that would definitely assist in training optometrists in my situation. The second impediment is the cost of the course. It is not only an expensive course, but it requires that we take time away from work for it to be completed. Once completing we are then not rewarded in any way for our services. We are restricted by the current medicare system to charge a limited amount. This makes us very dependant on an income derived from selling product (glasses and contact lenses) which in a competitive market place is becoming more and more difficult.

In conclusion whilst it would be fabulous, in theory, to have a fully therapeutically qualified workforce, to benefit the general public, as a practicing optometrist I would expect

1. a level of advertising from the health department letting people know that optometrists have such qualifications
2. a significant increase in the medicare rebate to cover a) the financial costs of completing the

course b) to be remunerated for our extra qualification.

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OPTOMETRIST