

2007/0243

## **PRESCRIPTIONS FROM YOUR HIGH STREET OPTICIANS**

### **Corrected Copy**

#### **Optometrists to get independent prescribing powers**

Health Minister Dawn Primarolo today announced that optometrists will be able to train to prescribe medicines. Patients will soon be examined, diagnosed, and get a prescription during one trip to the opticians.

Optometrists, also known as ophthalmic opticians, are health specialists trained in all aspects of eye health. As well as testing sight and prescribing glasses or contact lenses, they are also trained to recognise potentially blinding eye conditions such as macular degeneration and glaucoma and refer them on for medical care. Optometrists can also spot signs of conditions such as diabetes.

Independent prescribing will mean that specially trained optometrists will be able to write a prescription if they diagnose a problem needing treatment, saving the patient from having to make a separate appointment with their GP.

Dawn Primarolo said,

A simple eye test is crucial to keep eyes healthy and in the most serious cases, can save your sight.

Optometrists are trained eye health professionals. Enabling independent prescribing will not only allow them to make better use of their skills, but will also mean greater convenience for patients.

Rosie Varley, Chairman of the General Optical Council, said:

Independent prescribing is a significant development for optometrists, which builds on their existing clinical skills and experience. The move reflects high levels of public confidence in optometrists and optical regulation. For patients, it should mean that they get quality care faster, and more conveniently, than ever before.

The GOC will play a key role in ensuring that optometrists who want to become independent prescribers receive robust training and can practise safely within their competence, so that patients and the public can be confident about their care.

Kevin Lewis, President of the College of Optometrists, said:

“The College of Optometrists welcomes today's announcement of independent prescribing powers for optometrists. Allowing optometrists to prescribe independently will complement their existing diagnostic skills and further develop their role in the management of eye disease. These specialist optometrists will provide a valuable resource in both primary and secondary care environments. The College is working with City University in developing Clinical Management Guidelines that will be available shortly to support optometrists undertaking independent prescribing.”

Brenda Billington, President of the Royal College of Ophthalmologists, said:

This new development will enable the creation of more opportunities for optometrists to work with ophthalmologists in shared care schemes. We are pleased that the Minister recognises this potential and that suitable accreditation processes will be in place to ensure patient safety.

Optometrists will have to undertake further training before they can prescribe and, just like other prescribers, they will only work with the conditions within their areas of expertise.

Optometrists' prescribing practice will be informed by guidelines from the College of Optometrists. Qualified practitioners will need to apply for specialty registration with the General Optical Council.

Once trained, optometrists will only prescribe for conditions of the eye and its surrounding tissue and they will refer patients to an ophthalmologist where more specialised care is required.

### **Notes to editors**

Optometrists are trained to recognise eye diseases, referring on such cases as necessary. Optometrists may currently train as Additional Supply practitioners and Supplementary Prescribers, which enables them to carry out some additional roles in supplying and administering medicines or prescribing them in partnership with a doctor.

The proposal that certain optometrists should be given the power to prescribe medicines independently was put forward in a consultation document published in August 2006. The consultation closed last October and the Commission on Human Medicines (CHM) has considered these responses and formulated its advice to Ministers.

The CHM is an independent advisory body set up to give advice to Ministers in relation to the safety, quality and efficacy of human medicinal products and promote the collection and investigation of information relating to adverse reactions for

human medicines.

The CHM's advice to Ministers was that suitably qualified optometrists should be able to prescribe any licensed medicine for ocular conditions, affecting the eye and the tissues surrounding the eye, within the recognised area of expertise and competence of the optometrist.

CHM felt that patient safety is best served by concentrating prescribing responsibilities on the competence of individual prescribers – which is the practice now adopted for nurse and pharmacist prescribers - informed by clear professional guidelines. Optometrists will prescribe within their areas of expertise as agreed with their employer and multi-disciplinary team. No optometrist will prescribe a medicine for other than an ocular condition, and none will prescribe controlled drugs.

Optometrists who wish to take on independent prescribing responsibilities will undertake training provided by a Higher Education Institution and accredited by the General Optical Council. Once they have successfully completed their course, practitioners will need to register their independent prescribing specialty with the GOC, before they can exercise prescribing responsibilities. They will have to undertake continuing education and training to keep their skills up to date and maintain their specialty registration as a prescriber with the GOC.

The proposed changes would apply throughout the United Kingdom in both the NHS and the independent and voluntary sectors and Optometrists' prescribing practice will be informed by guidelines from the College of Optometrists.

There are around 10,000 registered optometrists in the UK. The government enabled optometrists to become supplementary prescribers in July 2005.

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