



New Regulations Give Ontarians Better Access to Eye Care

Wednesday April 6, 2011 Toronto, ON – The Ontario Government approved a regulation today that allows Ontario’s optometrists to start prescribing medications for their patients. Optometrists will now be able to prescribe treatments for conditions ranging from routine bacterial eye infections to more serious diseases including glaucoma. The change will alleviate wait times in emergency rooms and walk-in clinics for patients with eye-related problems.

“This is great news for our patients and everyone in Ontario,” notes Dr. John Mastronardi of Windsor, President of the Ontario Association of Optometrists (OAO). “Most of our members have been educated and trained to prescribe medications for years. We are pleased that the Ontario government has made changes that will broaden access to medically necessary services across the province.”

While Ontario is one of the last provinces to en-act this regulation, the new regulation has the widest scope in Canada and brings about the most benefits to patients.

For patient Jason Secord of Acton, he applauds the decision. “A few years ago, I almost lost the vision in my right eye because of a condition called iritis. I went to my optometrist and he knew what was wrong but he couldn’t prescribe the drops that I needed. Now if I ever have a problem again, I can go to my optometrist right away without putting my eye health at risk by waiting to see three different doctors for treatment.”

Today’s decision by the Ontario government means better healthcare and shorter wait times for patients while reducing costs for taxpayers.

The Executive Director of the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) Ontario, Paul Ting, also applauded the news. “This will make great strides in the treatment of all eye care,” says Ting. “Seventy five percent of vision loss is preventable or treatable. Preventing blindness is an urgent challenge with an aging population, and this will drastically improve access to clinical care.”

Optometrists are eye doctors who are university educated and clinically trained to diagnose and treat disorders of the eye and visual system. Optometrists complete a four year professional doctorate degree program and are regulated by the College of Optometrists of Ontario.

For more information on the eye conditions that optometrists can now treat and prescribe, please visit the Ontario Association of Optometrists website at: www.eyecareoao.com.

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Founded in 1909, OAO is the voluntary professional organization that represents more than 1,400 optometrists in Ontario. The Association proudly serves the profession by undertaking government advocacy, membership education and public awareness initiatives.

For more information:
Jim Warren
416-505-4773
jimwarren@riseley.ca



OAO Backgrounder: Therapeutic Pharmaceutical Agents (TPA) Regulation

- The Government of Ontario has approved a regulation of the College of Optometrists of Ontario (College) designating the drugs (therapeutic pharmaceutical agents - TPAs) that optometrists are authorized to prescribe. Effective immediately, accredited Ontario optometrists can prescribe medication to treat eye diseases and conditions including:
 - Bacterial and viral eye infections
 - Red eye due to contact lens wear
 - Eyelid infection and inflammation
 - Inflammation of the eye
 - Eye pain
 - Allergies affecting the eyes
 - Superficial foreign bodies
 - Glaucoma
- Only those optometrists who have demonstrated their compliance with the College's Therapeutic Pharmaceutical Agents Policy: Educational Requirements for Members to Prescribe Drugs (TPA Education Policy) – which ensures an appropriate educational background, proof of competence and currency of knowledge - are authorized to prescribe the drugs listed in the regulation.
- The Ontario Cabinet's approval of this regulation is the culmination of many years of hard work by the Ontario Association of Optometrists, which has long advocated for this government action to improve patient access to high quality, eye health care services close to home.
- The legislative authority to prescribe drugs was given to optometrists on June 4, 2007 through the enactment of the *Health System Improvements Act, 2007*, which amended the *Optometry Act, 1991* to expand optometry's scope of practice.
- As required by law, the College consulted many stakeholders, including the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and other regulated health professions, in the development of the regulation before submitting it for Cabinet approval in December 2010.
- Support for this legislated scope of practice expansion and regulation runs deep. In April 2006, the Health Professions Regulatory Advisory Council (HPRAC) – an agency of the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care - recommended that optometrists be able to prescribe TPAs. HPRAC re-affirmed this recommendation in its January 2009 report, *Critical Links*.