

General Optical Council



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Code of Conduct



Foreword

The GOC is pleased to publish its new Code of Conduct for Individual Registrants. We hope that this booklet will provide a useful guide to the Code for registrants, patients and the public.

All optometrists, dispensing opticians, trainee optometrists and trainee dispensing opticians must abide by the Code of Conduct in their personal and professional conduct at all times. If a registrant fails to comply with the duties and responsibilities set out in the Code of Conduct, they are putting their own registration at risk.

The new Code of Conduct comes into effect on 1 April 2010, and incorporates a number of changes. Until 1 April 2010, registrants must continue to follow the 2005 Code of Conduct, which is available from www.optical.org

Changes to the Code of Conduct for Individual Registrants have been formulated in accordance with the core values that underpin the GOC's work, to ensure it is:

- Proportionate
- Accountable
- Consistent
- Transparent
- Targeted

The Code has been revised following extensive consultation with patients and the public, registrants, the optical bodies, and other partner organisations. Full details and a report of the consultation process are available on our website. As with all GOC policies, we continually review the Code of Conduct to ensure it remains fair, effective and proportionate.

Business registrants (GOC-registered optical businesses) are bound by the Code of Conduct for Business Registrants, which is available from www.optical.org

This document is also available to download in Welsh from our website.

Dian Taylor

Chief Executive and Registrar

Introduction

GOC Code of Conduct for Individual Registrants

Patients (including customers) must be able to trust optometrists, dispensing opticians, and those undertaking training as optometrists and dispensing opticians, with their well-being. To justify that trust, you have a duty to maintain a good standard of practice and care, and to show respect for all people.

In all matters, you must never discriminate unfairly against patients or colleagues and must always be prepared to justify your actions.

This document describes principles of good practice in professional conduct and standards and sets out the framework of conduct required in all aspects of professional work. The principles are linked to the values which have been agreed by healthcare professionals to be common to all professions. All registrants must act in accordance with the principles set out in this Code. Failure to comply with the duties and responsibilities set out in the Code will put your registration at risk.

The GOC recognises that other bodies have issued detailed guidance with regard to matters covered in this Code. You are expected to comply with relevant local and national standards on clinical governance and be familiar with the relevant guidance and advice issued by other organisations and, in particular, that of the professional and representative bodies.

Reference may be made by the GOC to the guidance and advice of other bodies in the exercise of its functions. In addition, the GOC may from time to time supplement the Code with guidance on specific matters.





The Code

As a registered optometrist, dispensing optician, or person undertaking training as an optometrist or dispensing optician, you must:

1. Make the care of the patient your first and continuing concern;
2. Treat every patient politely and considerately;
3. Respect patients' dignity and privacy;
4. Listen to patients and respect their views;
5. Give patients information in a way they can understand and make them aware of the options available; on the issue of patient consent, be aware of and comply with the guidance published by the professional bodies;
6. Maintain adequate patients' records;
7. Respect the rights of patients to be fully involved in decisions about their care;
8. Keep professional knowledge and skills up to date;
9. Recognise, and act within, the limits of your professional competence;
10. Be honest and trustworthy;
11. Ensure that financial and commercial practices do not compromise patient safety;
12. Respect and protect confidential information;
13. Make sure that personal beliefs do not prejudice patient care;
14. Act quickly to protect patients from risk where there is good reason to believe that you, or a colleague, may not be fit to practise, fit to undertake training, or in the case of a business registrant fit to carry on business as an optometrist, dispensing optician or both¹;
15. Never abuse your professional position;
16. Work with colleagues in the ways that best serve patients' interests;
17. Register with and maintain registration with the GOC;
18. Be covered by adequate and appropriate insurance for practice in the United Kingdom throughout the period of your registration²;
19. Ensure your conduct, whether or not connected to your professional practice, does not damage public confidence in you or your profession.

Footnotes

1. If you have important information about yourself, other health professionals or organisations, which may mean that you, or they, lack the skills, knowledge, character or health to practise safely and effectively, or be trusted to act legally, you must act quickly to protect patients. In the first instance you should normally report your concern to your employer, manager or other appropriate person at your practice or business level. However if there is no such person and the matter cannot be addressed at practice or business level, your concern should be reported to the local primary care organisation. **However, you should inform the GOC if:**

- Taking action at a local level would not be practical;
- Action at a local level has failed;
- The problem is so serious that the GOC clearly needs to be involved;
- You are afraid of victimisation or a cover up.

You must let the GOC know straight away if you:

- Have been convicted of a criminal offence, convicted of a criminal offence resulting in a conditional discharge;
- Have accepted a police caution;
- Have been disciplined by any organisation responsible for regulating or licensing a health or social care professional;
- Are barred from working with children and/or vulnerable adults;
- Have been suspended or placed under a practice restriction by an employer or similar organisation because of concerns about your fitness to practise;
- Have a health condition which a reasonable person would think may impair your fitness to practise.

This list is not exhaustive.

You should co-operate with any investigation or formal inquiry about your, or another health professional's, fitness to practise, fitness to undertake training as an optometrist or dispensing optician, or the fitness of a business registrant to carry on business as an optometrist, dispensing optician, or both.

2. Training establishments or practice supervisors must ensure that their insurance arrangements provide adequate and appropriate cover for all persons undertaking training or practical experience for whom they are responsible. It is the responsibility of the person undertaking training to ensure that such insurance has been provided by their training establishment or practice supervisor.



Glossary

Clinical governance: The system through which healthcare organisations are accountable for continuously improving the quality of their services and safeguarding high standards of care.

Dispensing optician: A dispensing optician fits and supplies glasses; with further training they can also fit contact lenses.

Optician: Collective term often used to refer to optometrists and dispensing opticians.

Optometrist: An optometrist tests sight, and can also fit and supply glasses or contact lenses. With further training, they can qualify to prescribe certain drugs for eye conditions.

Patient consent: When a patient allows a particular procedure or treatment to go ahead.

Primary care: GP-led services provided by family doctors and those who work with them including opticians.

Professional and representative bodies: The collective term used to refer to the organisations that represent and support the optical professions in the UK. They include the Association of Optometrists, the Association of British Dispensing Opticians, the College of Optometrists and the Federation of Ophthalmic and Dispensing Opticians.

Registration: Optometrists and dispensing opticians who wish to practise in the UK have to be registered with the GOC.

