

General Optical Council



Code of Conduct for business registrants



Foreword

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

All bodies corporate registered with the GOC, and their employees, must abide by the Code of Conduct at all times. If a business registrant fails to comply with the duties and responsibilities set out in the Code of Conduct, they put their registration at risk.

The new Code of Conduct comes into effect on 1 April 2010, and incorporates a number of changes.

Changes to the Code of Conduct for Business 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 our Codes of Conduct to ensure they remain fair, effective and proportionate.

Individual registrants (optometrists, dispensing opticians and optical students) are bound by the Code of Conduct for Individual 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

Code of Conduct for Business Registrants

This document describes principles of good practice in professional conduct and standards. It sets out a framework of conduct expected of all bodies corporate carrying on business as an optometrist, dispensing optician or both.¹ All business 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 registration at risk.

The Code supports and should be read in conjunction with the Code of Conduct for Individual Registrants and such other guidance issued by the GOC.

The Code is not exhaustive. The GOC expects business registrants to be aware of relevant guidance and advice issued by other organisations and in particular that of the professional and representative bodies, and to comply with relevant local and national standards on clinical governance.

The duties and responsibilities of optometrists and dispensing opticians registered with the GOC are set out in the GOC's Code of Conduct for Individual Registrants.

Optometrists and dispensing opticians, regardless of whether they are employed or self-employed, are individually responsible for acting at all times in the best interests of their patients, and for delivering clinical practice which complies with the GOC's competencies for their profession.

In support of, but in no way lessening this individual responsibility, business registrants employing or otherwise engaging optometrists, dispensing opticians and other clinical professionals in the delivery of optical services play an essential part in maintaining standards and protecting the public.

In particular, business registrants fulfil a key role in supplying the infrastructure which supports clinical practice; providing essential support to recruitment and professional training, including the provision and delivery of continuing education and training; maintaining and enhancing standards in clinical and corporate governance; and in creating an appropriate working environment in which practitioners enjoy clinical freedom.





The Code

Business registrants play an integral part in the provision of optical services and products to the public. Patients, consumers and professionals must be able to trust business registrants to maintain and support a good standard of clinical practice and care.

To justify that trust, a business registrant will take reasonable and proportionate steps to:

1. Ensure that each person who undertakes activities regulated by the Opticians Act does so in accordance with the Act;
2. Require as a condition of employment or engagement that those individual registrants currently employed or otherwise engaged to provide optical services comply with the GOC's Code of Conduct for Individual Registrants;
3. Not knowingly act in a way which might contribute to or cause a breach of the Code of Conduct for Individual Registrants by any individual registrant employed or otherwise engaged by it to provide optical services;
4. Ensure that individual registrants are always able freely to exercise their professional judgement in the best interests of patients;
5. Provide a system for the proper maintenance of patient records;
6. Respect and protect confidential information for both patients and employees in accordance with current legislation;
7. Ensure that advertising or publicity complies with appropriate advertising codes of practice;
8. Provide mechanisms to enable those that work for or are otherwise engaged by the business registrant to raise concerns about risks to patients;
9. Protect patients if it has reason to believe that an individual registrant or other health professional, may not be fit to practise, fit to undertake training, or if a business registrant, may not be fit to carry on business as an optometrist, dispensing optician or both;²
10. Ensure that the criteria enshrined in this code are applied as may be appropriate to registered medical practitioners in relation to the GMC and any other relevant codes and guidance; and
11. Ensure that financial and commercial practices do not compromise patient safety.

Footnotes

1. A body corporate includes limited companies (public and private), limited liability partnerships and, in Scotland, partnerships. Other kinds of business such as partnerships in England, Northern Ireland and Wales and sole traders are not bodies corporate and cannot register as business registrants with the GOC.
2. If a business registrant has important information about themselves, other health professionals or organisations, which may mean that they lack the skills, knowledge, character or health to practise safely and effectively, or be trusted to act legally, they must act quickly to protect patients. In the first instance this would normally be by taking action through the internal management structure of the business, or where appropriate to the local primary care organisation.

However, business registrants 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; or
- There is fear of victimisation or a cover up.

Business registrants should co-operate with any investigation or formal inquiry about an individual registrant's, 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.



Glossary

Body corporate: A body corporate is a limited company or limited liability partnership that has been incorporated with Companies House. Bodies corporate registered with the GOC are known as business registrants.

Business registrant: A business registrant is a body corporate that has registered with the GOC.

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

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 particular 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.

H T Y C

18

V U A X

12

H A Y O U

9

Y U X T H A O

6



General Optical Council

41 Harley Street, London W1G 8DJ

Telephone +44 (0)20 7580 3898

Fax +44 (0)20 7307 3939

Email goc@optical.org

www.optical.org