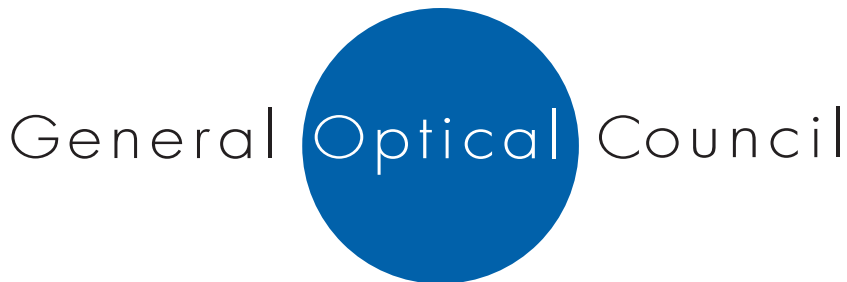


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From the Registrar

There is so much change currently happening in the area of regulation that we are issuing this Bulletin in addition to the registration information recently sent out. Unlike the website, to which the public have access, this Bulletin is for registrants only, to give you a better understanding of the changes that are being managed in 2004 and 2005. We would welcome your comments on both the Bulletin and its contents.

Current issues include the **European Parliament's discussion on the recognition of professional qualifications**. We must ensure that MEPs understand the need for service users to have access to adequately qualified and competent clinicians. The concern of all the clinical regulatory bodies is to uphold UK requirements for registration so we can be sure that healthcare professionals have the appropriate training and can communicate effectively with service users.

Continuing Education and Training: the choice of ACT Consultants as the GOC's preferred provider for the administration of the CET scheme is a new venture for the GOC. The aim is to introduce an efficient and cost effective method of ensuring the accreditation and verification of the continuing education process. Crucial to the contract with ACT Consultants is the ability of the GOC to ensure that the costs are properly reflective of the resource requirements.

The complexities of CET will be reflected during 2004 in the discussion of the rules for **therapeutic prescribing by optometrists**. This will very much illustrate the issue of how in addition to their 12 minimum CET points a year registrants will require further points to reflect the needs of their additional competencies that are identified in the register.

We will be using the work of the Education Committee on the development of competencies as the background to induction training for the new **Fitness to Practise Panel members**. The 40 Panel members (see page 7 and the website) will start their formal induction training in the summer.

Peter C. Coe, Registrar

Continuing Education & Training: compulsory from January 2005

Background

There are some 5,000 dispensing opticians and 10,000 optometrists on the GOC Register.

The constitution and functions of the GOC are embodied in the Opticians Act 1989 (formerly the 1958 Act). Its essential role is the protection of the public and the maintenance of adequate and safe professional standards of practice through the registration of those trained and qualified as dispensing opticians and optometrists.

The Opticians Act 1989 ("the Act") details the GOC's powers and duties. The education of dispensing opticians and optometrists is an important aspect of the GOC's work.

The GOC considers that a registered dispensing optician or optometrist, as a health professional, should not be permitted to continue to practise without some regulation for updating knowledge and skills. This is particularly the case in a profession where there are continuing changes in technical and clinical skills and a developing scope of clinical practice. The GOC has concluded that it should be a condition of retaining registration that dispensing opticians and optometrists should complete a prescribed minimum amount of continuing education and training (CET) within a stated period.

Legislative Change

In November 2000 the GOC submitted to the Department of Health (DH) proposals for legislative change. The

submission included a proposal for legislation requiring registered dispensing opticians and optometrists to undertake continuing education and training.

It is anticipated that the changes to the Act will come into force during 2004. Consequential changes to statutory rules allowing the implementation of the CET Scheme are unlikely to be completed until early 2005.

The GOC, in anticipation of attaining legislative change, issued an invitation to any interested body or bodies or consortia of interested bodies to tender for the management of the Scheme. In July 2003 it identified Act Consultants Ltd as the preferred manager of the Scheme. The GOC is now discussing with Act Consultants the preliminary work they will be doing in 2004.

It is intended that the Scheme should be open to all who hold qualifications enabling registration to practise within the scope of practice approved by the GOC, regardless of whether they are registered to practise as dispensing opticians and optometrists in the UK.

The GOC will audit the arrangements for the Scheme. The GOC has no intention of administering the Scheme itself, but reserves the right to do so if the need arises.

CET - a definition

CET is taken to mean the maintenance of up-to-date knowledge and skills required for the safe exercise of professional activities, following the obtaining of the professional qualification enabling registration. CET is distinct from Continuing Professional Development (CPD) which is the opportunity to develop professional knowledge and skills to advance in the profession, beyond the level of general registration.

Enquiries about CET to:

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Progress on Codes of Conduct for individual and business registrants

Registrants will be aware that the GOC has recently been debating the introduction of two Codes of Conduct, one for Individual Registrants and one for Business Registrants. Once Parliament and the Privy Council have agreed our legislative package, the GOC will have the statutory power to issue such guidance.

The Draft Code of Conduct for Individual Registrants went out for consultation in 2003 to every registrant and we are extremely grateful to all those who responded. As a result of the responses, the GOC significantly shortened the draft Code.

The final form of the Code for Individual Registrants is to be debated at the forthcoming March Council and it is to be hoped that it will be issued later this year. The GOC has begun looking at a Code of Conduct for Business Registrants and what might be the appropriate provision. The GOC will comment on the Code later this year.

New faces at the GOC

As this is the first of the GOC's bulletins we should take the opportunity to introduce to the profession a few new faces.

In September 2003, a new Director of Standards and Deputy Registrar joined the GOC. **Melanie Carter** is a solicitor who has a background in public and professional regulatory law. Her first tasks have been to progress the Code of Conduct, the debate on Therapeutic Prescribing and to develop an initial scheme for the Revalidation of optometrists and dispensing opticians. Previously she has worked for the public law group and before that in Central Government.

In December 2003 **Catharine Perry** joined the GOC in the new post of Office Manager. Most of her working life has been spent in charities, most recently for the Outward Bound Trust and the British Red Cross.

Two new Council Members

In January Mrs Shaheen Chaudhry and Dr Geoff Harris joined the General Optical Council.



Shaheen Chaudhry lives in Bristol and has a background in community health advocacy and training in areas such as equal opportunities and cultural diversity. She is also a lay member of the General Medical Council and the Health Professionals Council.

Geoff Harris was a medical research scientist before joining the Wellcome Foundation in 1984. Most recently he has been Managing Director of an international life sciences group. He is currently also a Non-Executive Director and Vice Chairman of Bucks Mental Health NHS Trust.



Developments in Therapeutics

In 1999 the Crown Review recommended to the Government that optometrists should be able to prescribe medicines in the course of their professional practice. The Review recognised the significant benefits to patients and the health system in general (including reduced waiting lists for the Hospital Eye Service and convenient and timely treatment in the community). The diagnostic skills of optometrists and their specialist clinical knowledge underpinned the recommendation that prescribing rights, albeit in relation to a limited formulary, should be introduced as soon as possible.

Supplementary Prescribing

Late last year the then Minister for Health, Lord Hunt, announced that supplementary prescribing rights would be introduced during the course of 2004 and independent prescribing rights in 2005.

Supplementary prescribing is an arrangement whereby an independent prescriber (eg a doctor) carries out the diagnosis of the patient who is then treated by the supplementary prescriber under the auspices of a clinical management plan. An independent prescriber, as the name suggests, may work alone in the diagnosis of, and prescription of medicines for, the patient. As independent prescribing is not to be introduced until 2005, the Minister further indicated that the Government would look to expand the exemptions under the Medicines Act 1968 whereby optometrists may already sell/supply/write a written order for certain prescriptions and medicines (eg chloramphenicol).

Competencies: work with the National Prescribing Centre

To prepare for these legislative changes, the GOC has taken a number of steps. First, it has commissioned the National Prescribing Centre to work with groups of eye care professionals to establish the competencies which an optometrist would need to be able to demonstrate in order to prescribe medicines safely. These competencies will form the bedrock of all that follows. Our thanks go out to all the registrants who took part in this project.

Therapeutics Courses

Initially the competencies will inform the outline curriculum and in turn, the additional therapeutics courses that will need to be developed. The GOC will, of course, need to accredit these courses. Once an optometrist has successfully completed an accredited course (which will include some practical clinical experience) s/he would be entitled to be entered onto a specialist list. During the course of 2004 the GOC will draft Rules for the accreditation process and establishment of the specialist list. The Opticians Act 1989, once amended, will protect the title of an optometrist providing a specialist service such that only those qualified will be able to practice in this capacity.

It may initially be only a minority of optometrists who will wish to develop this practice in this way. Naturally we expect these to be important developments in the

scope of the practice of optometry, ones which will have far reaching implications for the way the profession is viewed both within the health service and by the public at large.

Exemptions

The competencies and outline curricula will also serve to support an application to the Committee on Safety of Medicines headed by the

GOC. The application, to be made in early spring, will seek to persuade the Committee that a wider set of drugs may safely be available for use by optometrists in the course of their professional practice under exemptions to the Medicine Act 1968.

Anyone who would like more information on the subject should contact Melanie Carter, the Director of Standards.

Registration News

Fees and Forms

The GOC introduced a new Annual Renewal Form in 2004, designed to make the process of registration renewal that much clearer and easier to understand. The forms were posted to all Registrants in early January with the request that payment be received by 14 March in order to enable processing to be completed by 31 March.

Those Registrants who are already on the direct debit (DD) scheme were notified of this fact on the Declaration Letter – the letters DDI above the Registration number signify DD status. Those not on the DD scheme will have received a blank DD form and a credit card payment form to be used if the registrant would prefer this payment method over a cheque payment.

All registrants must pay the revised

Annual Fee of £135 for the year 1 April 2004 – 31 March 2005.

New Registration Committee

In anticipation of the approval of the Legislative Change package, the GOC has formed a shadow Registration Committee to consider issues arising from the present registration process and to undertake an initial review of forthcoming issues.

Membership comprises two Lay members, including the Chairman, a dispensing optician, an optometrist and an ophthalmologist. The Committee is already discussing issues of “good character”, and “fit to practise” in terms of new registrants as well as the operational issues around student registration and those from non-EEC areas.

The Opticians' Register 2004

The printed GOC Register will be published in July 2004, after the completion of the annual registration process. In keeping with the times the Register will also be changing to an A4 format which enables the information to be read and extracted more easily than the older style format.

The price of the Register remains £30 if ordered to be sent with the Annual Registration Form or £30 plus £5 for post and packing if ordered thereafter.

Fitness to Practise: the new panel members

Lay Members

Dr Dozie Azubike, Reading
 Mr Alan Baldwin, Middlesex
 Prof Helga Drummond, Lancashire
 Sir Alistair Graham, W Yorkshire
 Ms Margaret Hallendorff, London
 Dr Vicki Harris, London
 Mr Robert Holdsworth, Worcester
 Mrs Geraldine Huka, London
 Ms Mercy Jeyasingham, Surrey
 Ms Francesca Jones, Bristol
 Mrs Corinna Kershaw, Surrey
 Mr Arif Khan, Surrey
 Mr Peter North, Norfolk
 Mr Rodney Varley, Birmingham
 Lady Margaret Wall, London

Mr Mark Lomas, Leicestershire
 Miss Janice McCrudden, Co. Down
 Mrs Yvonne Norgett, Cambridge
 Ms Elizabeth O'Donoghue,
 Londonderry
 Mr Paul Reeves, Norwich
 Mr Stephen Reily, Cleveland
 Mr Geoff Roberson, Essex
 Dr Ronald Stevenson, Ayrshire
 Prof Stephen Taylor, Dorset
 Mrs Helen Tilley, Monmouthshire
 Ms Catherine Viner, Cheshire

Optometrists

Mr Peter Charlesworth,
 Dumfriesshire
 Prof Nizar Hirji, Birmingham
 Ms Alison Hudson, Motherwell
 Mr Gordon Ilett, Kent
 Mr Rakesh Kapoor, Middlesex

Dispensing Opticians

Mr Timothy Bowden, Kent
 Mr Andrew Cripps, Cambridge
 Miss Abilene Grute, Hampshire
 Mr Anthony Harvey, Nottingham
 Mr Richard Hensley, Surrey
 Mr Hilary King, Surrey
 Miss Ravinder Plahay, W Yorkshire
 Mr Nigel Roberts, Hampshire
 Ms Susan Southgate, Cambridge

Ethnic Monitoring Form

We would like to thank all of you who returned the voluntary Ethnic Monitoring Form. Although only a snapshot of the total membership, the exercise has been useful.

	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Total</u>
Gender	579	633	1212
Disability	22	5	27
Ethnicity: British	495	509	1004
Irish	12	33	45
Indian	32	54	86
S African	12	7	19
European	10	9	19
Others	18	21	39

Revalidation

In 2003 the GOC resolved to introduce a system of Revalidation for optometrists and dispensing opticians. Its task in 2004 will be to devise the appropriate form of revalidation, ensuring that it suits the particular nature of the optical profession. The scheme must both ensure patient safety and be commensurate with the risks involved.

The GOC looked at other schemes such as that used by the GMC but has recognised that the GMC model cannot easily be translated to a

system for optometrists and dispensing opticians. It is considering what information a registrant would need to provide on an application for revalidation (eg proof of insurance, good character) and whether there should be some form of peer appraisal. The 2004 November Council meeting will discuss in detail a proposed revalidation process.

Future bulletins will keep registrants informed of developments in this field.

What do you think ?

We would like to hear what you think about the *GOC Bulletin*. Do you find it informative? Are there any specific issues you would like us to cover? We would also welcome comments on the content and format of the GOC website – www.optical.org.

Please send your suggestions and comments to us at:

clambert@optical.org

or:

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