

Zero-powered contact lenses – factsheet

The General Optical Council (GOC) is the regulator for the optical professions in the UK. Our purpose is to protect the public by promoting high standards of education, conduct and performance amongst opticians. We currently register around 24,000 optometrists, dispensing opticians, student opticians and optical businesses.

Following the BBC Wales programme *X-ray* segment (broadcast 31 January 2011) on so-called ‘cosmetic lenses’, we are providing these resources to inform retailers who are unwittingly selling these products to alert them of the possible implications.

The GOC's position, as set out in the 2006 statement on the sale and supply of optical appliances (http://www.optical.org/goc/filemanager/root/site_assets/legislation/2006-10-30_statement_on_sale_and_supply.pdf), and the pamphlet issued with the British Contact Lens Association (http://www.optical.org/goc/filemanager/root/site_assets/publications/patient_leaflets/buying_lenses/buying_lenses_7b.pdf), is as follows:

Sales of zero-powered contact lenses require supervision by an optometrist, dispensing optician or medical doctor.

We consider zero-powered contact lenses to be contact lenses as set out in Section 27(1) of the Opticians Act 1989 (as inserted by Section 20 of the Amendment Order 2005) and in the 2006 statement (as above). Consequently we consider the kind of items being described in this case are contact lenses.

Supervision

We will consider in each individual case whether the requirements have been met.

Next steps

The GOC has a protocol requiring us to review all reports that an offence might have been committed under the Opticians Act (including zero-powered contact lenses being sold without supervision) and to take appropriate steps, usually corresponding with the relevant people and sending Cease and Desist letters if warranted. Further action may be taken if necessary, for example, a private prosecution or liaison with the CPS or other public prosecuting body.

At its meeting on 27 January 2011, the Council agreed to review the protocol as part of its process of ensuring that this and other guidance is up to date.

We welcome the opportunity to take part in this debate. The optometrists and dispensing opticians registered with the GOC provide high quality eye care to the British public. We want to make sure members of the public understand that they should always seek professional guidance from their optometrist or dispensing optician to protect their eye health. Please see www.optical.org for more information.