



May 14, 2008.

Anne Schiefer, Project Manager
Health Professions Regulatory Advisory Council
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Dear Ms. Schiefer:

As stakeholders, the Ontario Opticians Association (OOA) and the Opticians Association of Canada (OAC) have been invited to comment on The Ministerial Referral On Interprofessional Collaboration Among Health Colleges And Professionals. We are pleased to do so.

We congratulate the Ministry on the thoroughness of the consultation process and for demonstrating leadership in this very important area of best practice Interprofessional Collaboration. There is no question that the public benefits in many ways when Health Care Professionals work together toward greater efficiency, wider choices in service delivery, as well as uniformity of training standards and regulation. The OOA and the OAC support and endorse this initiative. Anything that encourages increased collaboration and less turf protection can only benefit patients and the overall sustainability of the system.

However we make the following observations.

Solutions are Cultural and Political Not Legislative

A model of governance in which discipline matters, for example, are handled by a panel that would adjudicate charges made against both Opticians and Optometrists suggests there is a legislative solution for an issue that is at its essence cultural and political. HPRAC's research has identified this impediment.

- Competition, fear and misunderstanding among health professionals
- Historic impediments, including profession-specific education, different philosophical approach to care, overlapping and conflicting bodies of knowledge and cultural difference among professions and
- Lack of knowledge, acceptance and respect of competencies, skills and training of all health professionals by patients and other health professionals.

While revised legislation or an enhanced regulatory model may be part of the solution, attempts to enforce cooperation will fail without a dramatic shift in entrenched attitudes that have fostered competitive rather than collaborative health care delivery. For example the recent Competition Bureau Report on Health Care Professions exposed the deep-rooted and long-standing regulations, by-laws and policies that have created barriers to a free and logical association between Opticians and Optometrists.

In a self-regulating profession the cultural paradigms that exist at the College level only mirror that of the profession as a whole. Our members believe that the professional associations and the educators of the professions have the best chance of changing attitudes and that they therefore have a responsibility to consider areas such as primary and continuing education in which fundamental collaboration may be possible. In the case of Opticians and Optometrists, if the barrier that prevents Optometrists from hiring or being hired by Opticians and in fact from becoming partners in practice, were eliminated new working relationships would be discovered followed quickly by increasing cross-professional respect and understanding.

Collaboration Works at the Clinical and Educational Levels

HPRAC has observed that in reviewing the work of other jurisdictions that have grappled with this issue, “collaboration among regulatory bodies did not appear to be as well developed as Interprofessional initiatives at the clinical and educational levels.” In point of fact this is very encouraging as it indicates grass roots willingness to work together where delivery of care takes place rather than at the bureaucratic level.

The OOA and the OAC are hopeful that this spirit can be mirrored in Canada. It is through the individual will of professionals based on the practical necessity of circumstances that will move us closer to the collaborative model we seek. For example, Professionals with overlapping scopes of practice work together well in remote settings where the goal is uncluttered and clearly to provide an essential service to geographically and often economically disadvantaged individuals. It shouldn't be difficult to duplicate that spirit if competing groups keep their eye on the goal, which should always be best practice safe service to citizens.

The OOA and the OAC look forward to the report that will evolve from this discussion and to becoming an integral and equal player in the work that will inevitably grow as new models of collaboration are discussed and refined.

Yours truly,



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