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COLLEGE *of* OPTICIANS  
OF BRITISH COLUMBIA  
a B.C. Health Regulator

COLLEGE OF OPTICIANS  
OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

# STANDARDS OF PRACTICE SURVEY RESULTS

Competence | Professional Conduct | Clinical Requirements



## Introduction

On January 25, 2015, the Board of the College of Opticians of BC (the “College”) directed staff to administer a survey to registrants about their understanding of the Standards of Practice and the support that they need to practice to standards. The information collected from the survey will help the College focus its resources to the areas that need the most improvement and support as indicated by registrants.

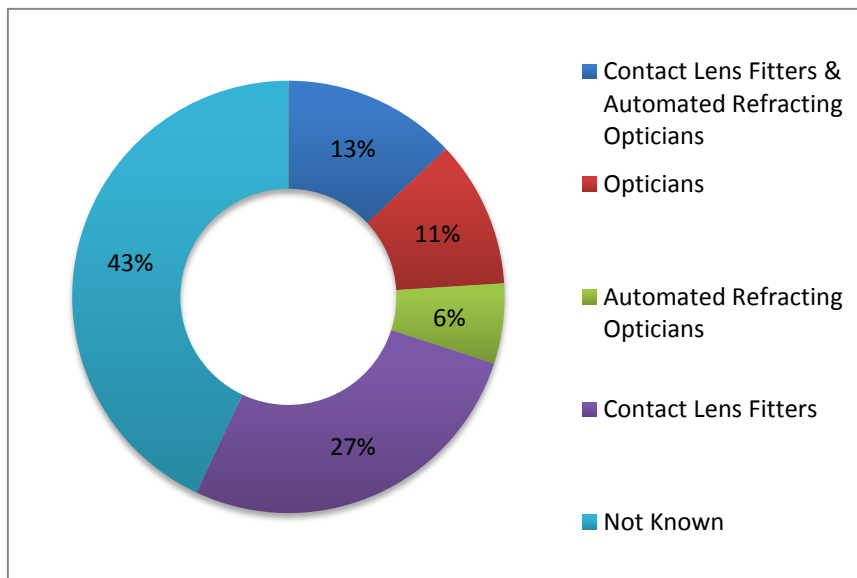
The intent is to help registrants practice to standards, whether it be through improving the clarity for practice standards by developing additional standards and guidelines in needed areas; providing more seminars about the standards; or publishing case studies of how standards apply in different practice situations.

All registrants are expected to practise according to the standards. The Standards of Practice document is a dynamic resource developed to provide a guide for the standard of care all patients should receive from any optician, contact lens fitter, and/or automated refracting optician that they visit. A copy is published on the College’s [website](#).

## How we Gathered Information

The College administered the survey from mid-February to end of March 2015. The survey link was included in the confirmation emails sent to registrants upon renewing their registration. In total, we gathered 100 respondents, which represent about 10% of the total optician population in British Columbia. While the sample size was chosen based on convenience as these included the first 100 respondents to the survey, we ended up with representation from contact lens fitters, opticians, and automated refracting opticians. The College was interested in the aggregate results, therefore, the registration information from respondents were not initially required. All the respondents are current registrants of the College.

**Figure 1: Breakdown of survey respondents by registration categories/certification<sup>1</sup>**



<sup>1</sup> Registration details are not known for these respondents. The College did not initially require registration information from survey participants to allow anonymous responses.



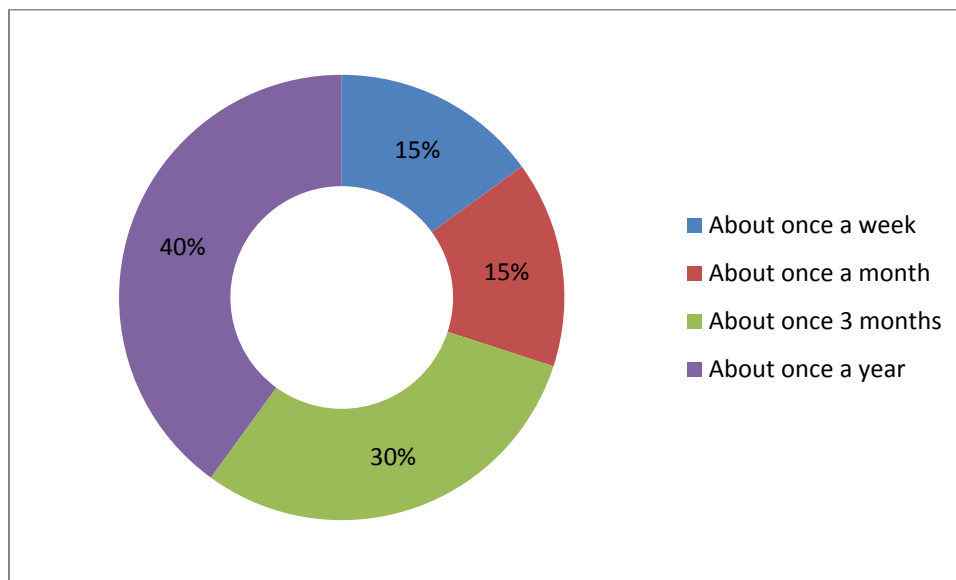
In total, we had 8 items on the standards, which included close-ended multiple choice questions (4) and open-ended questions (4). For the close-ended questions, we provided a comment field for registrants to add responses that were not enumerated in the choices.

Responses to open-ended questions were not ranked and were presented as the four most common answers under the [Survey Results](#). For close-ended questions, they were easily tabulated and results were presented as percentages.

## Survey Results

### Question 1: How often do you use the Standards of Practice (standards) to guide your practice?

**Figure 2: Frequency of use of the standards by survey respondents**



### Question 2: What topics do you often consult the standards about?

Prescription	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• out-of-the country</li><li>• duplicating &amp; modifying – what are the parameters?</li><li>• validity, expiry, and release</li></ul>
Prism & tolerance chart	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• axis</li></ul>
Records management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• confidentiality, storage, transfer of files, release to customers and other eye care providers</li></ul>
Practice standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• opticians, automated refracting opticians, contact lens fitters</li><li>• responsibilities over non-licensed staff, other registrants</li></ul>



Some respondents noted that they do not consult the standards frequently because the standards and guidelines are already incorporated into their office policies and business practices. Others commented that they periodically consult the standards to keep up to date with any changes. While others were confident that there is no need to consult the standards since they have been practising for decades.

**Question 3: Have you encountered situations in your practice where you think the standards did not provide enough information to guide you? What are these situations? Please be specific.**

Non-opticians on staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>responsibility and liability over non-licensed staff</li><li>roles and responsibilities of students, other non-licensed staff</li><li>how to resolve issues</li></ul>
Prescriptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>release to patients and other Eye Care Providers (ECPs), specific guidelines</li><li>information on expiry is vague and open to interpretations leading to confusion</li><li>out-of-province – acceptability and what is the required information that must be on the prescription</li><li>PD measurements (who is responsible to provide to patients) if multiple ECPs are involved</li><li>responsibility if patient decided to buy online after consultation</li><li>contact lens dispensing from eyeglasses prescription</li><li>pupillary distance – guidelines in providing this to consumer if not noted on the prescription; accuracy</li><li>add power - providing add power if not noted on prescription</li></ul>
Contact lens fitting and dispensing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>box top dispensing – confusion over what is allowed</li><li>responsibility over patients not wanting a fitting or not coming back for follow-up consultations</li><li>liability over patients who came for first visits but buying elsewhere</li><li>out-of-country contact lens records</li></ul>
Denial of Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Guidelines for when to deny services to a patient, e.g. not following the consultation schedule</li></ul>

For this question, a number of registrants commented that slight variations in applying the standards in what registrants termed as “grey scenarios” could be a challenge. One common question is around prescriptions. Are they still able to use a five-year prescription for dispensing purposes?

**Question 4: Please recommend ways that the standards could be improved. Are there topics that are unclear or difficult to understand?**

Topics identified under this question were similar to those already enumerated as responses to previous questions e.g. expiry of prescription, box-top contact lens dispensing, and responsibility as the only licensed



professional on staff (supervising v working with others). In addition, most respondents suggested clearer and simpler writing style for the standards. For example, having the scope of practice outlined in point form or a list of what registrants can and cannot do. One optician suggested developing a smartphone application (app) for easy access of the standards and other important information. Others suggested definite guidelines and fewer “grey areas”. These are the areas where professional judgment must be applied as they vary from patient to patient.

**Question 5: What topics or information are missing in the current standards?**

Prescription	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specifics should be provided, e.g. expiry</li> <li>• Dealing with inaccurate PDs from prescriptions</li> </ul>
Use of technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online companies and the jurisdiction of the College</li> <li>• Supervision – remote – online dispensing</li> <li>• Use of newer technologies - responsibility</li> </ul>
Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication with colleagues, responsibility if there is a complaint</li> </ul>
Sight-testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clearer standards – dispensing off an assessment record</li> </ul>

The use of technology, including online dispensing, came up as a common response. Respondents requested more information in the use of new technologies and their responsibilities as opticians. Other opticians were asking about online vision providers and whether they fall within the same standards.

**Question 6: What would you consider as barriers for using the standards? Please choose all that apply.**

**Table 1: List of barriers for using the standards based on the survey responses**

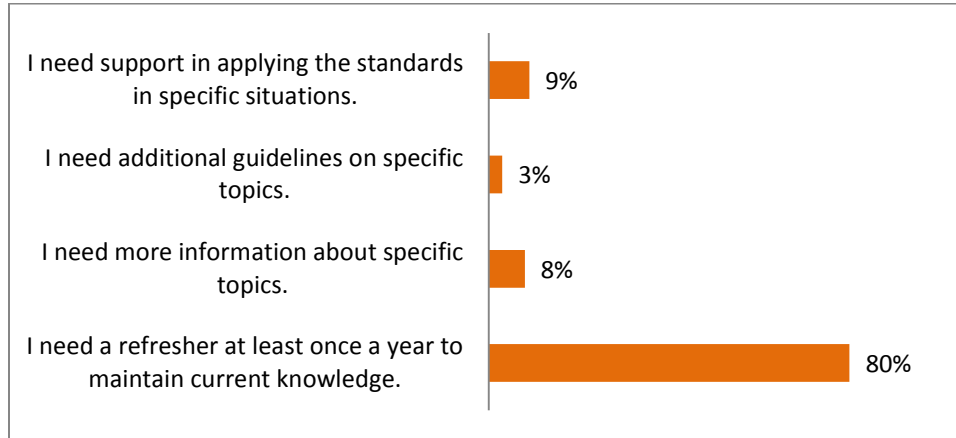
Lack of support from employer	22%
Difficult to find information about standards & guidelines that can be applied in specific situations	21%
Standards do not support my place of work's business or practice model	12%
I am hesitant to ask my colleagues or call the College about the standards since I am expected to know them already	25%
I do not need to consult the standards as I know my responsibilities as a Licensed Optician	33%
The document format is difficult to use	19%

While 33% responded they do not need to consult the standards since they know their responsibilities as opticians, barriers still exist.



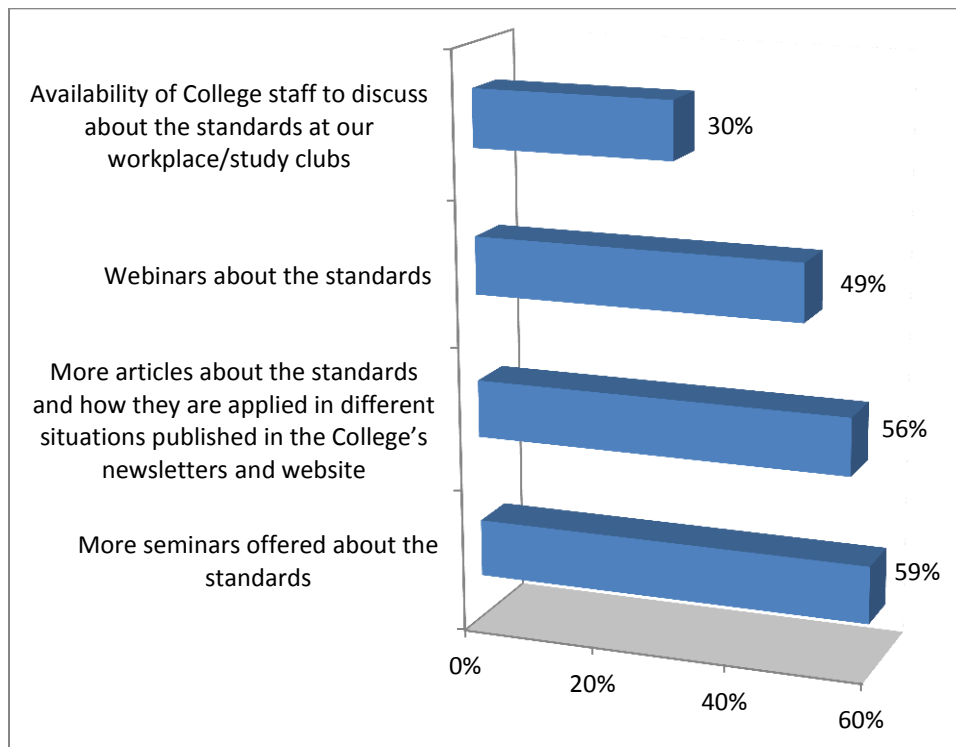
**Question 7: How would you describe the level of support that you need in practising the standards? Please choose the most appropriate response.**

**Figure 3: Level of support needed by survey respondents to practise the standards**



**Question 8: How can the College support you in using the standards? Please choose all that apply.**

**Figure 4: Support needed by survey respondents from the COBC to use the standards**





## Analysis

The College was interested in the collective response to identify themes to focus its resources where it is needed the most. The survey results provided the level of detail the College intended to collect. Although the results could not be generalized to apply to the whole optician population in British Columbia, the College observed that the topics the opticians often consulted the standards about are the same topics registrants ask College staff. For the past three years, topics frequently enquired by registrants included: issues relating to prescription, records management, and non-registrants on staff.

Registrants provided useful recommendations, ranging from simple to comprehensive. For example, a number of registrants suggested the College provide them with a paper copy of the standards since they are not able to access the digital copy from work. Others recommended clarifying or adding standards and guidelines for certain topics. A number of opticians also requested definite guidelines over “grey scenarios”. While the standards will not include all the guidelines for every scenario, more practice scenarios and decision-making tools can be provided to opticians.

In summary, the responses demonstrate that:

- 1) There are multiple questions regarding prescriptions, contact lens records, assessment records, and records management. Some of these topics may be addressed by organizing seminars or webinars to discuss case studies where different sections of the standards are applied to various situations. One optician suggested providing registrants a decision-making tree to help with decision-making processes with patient care.

From time to time, College staff have received questions from registrants regarding prescription expiry and dispensing off out-of-province prescriptions. The College has published information about this subject on its website <http://www.cobc.ca/Prescriptions.aspx>. The survey has indicated that the information on the College website can be expanded, e.g. identify the contraindications, and incorporate in the decision-making tree, and provide this information through other communication methods.

In addition, registrants have sought clarification on the information that is required in contact lens records, assessment records, and patient records and the obligations with the information that needs to be released to patients/other providers. The survey has indicated that more education and templates would help registrants understand the required patient information that needs to be documented and released.

- 2) The reality of dynamic practice models brings to the forefront the issue of supervision and the responsibilities of opticians over non-licensed staff. Some opticians find themselves in situations where they are the only regulated professionals on staff. In such situations guidelines are useful to help guide the supervision responsibilities of opticians over non-regulated staff and also shared supervision responsibility of non-regulated staff with other professionals (e.g.: optometrist and ophthalmologists).



Opticians reported in the survey that sometimes their work situation makes it difficult for them to meet the Standard of Practice. Aside from being the only regulated professionals on staff, some of them may not be working full-time at a single dispensary.

The Quality Assurance Committee has developed draft standards on supervision over non-registrants for contact lens fitting tasks. In future, supervision guidelines could be expanded to include guidelines on supervision beyond contact lens fitting. The College will work with opticians to gather feedback on the draft standards and guidelines to ensure that these can be applied to their practice situations.

- 3) Registrants indicated a need for new guidelines regarding use of technology, particularly online dispensing. Questions relating to online dispensing included: the College's jurisdiction over online providers, responsibilities of opticians on staff, and how public safety can be ensured if there is only one optician within that dispensary. Developing specific standards and guidelines can support opticians in thriving within an evolving practice environment. Once again, the survey indicated that registrants thought more education on this topic would be helpful.

The College has organized an Optician Forum about technology, including e-commerce.<sup>2</sup> Additional guidelines or information will be useful for opticians to demonstrate how standards and guidelines apply when technology is used to deliver certain services.

- 4) Opticians can benefit from extensive discussion about records management, including the types of patient information that must be collected and stored; the release and transfer of information to different entities; and the eventual destruction of such information.

There are various issues raised around records management. As collaborative practice models evolve, the amount of patient records collected and the method by which they are collected evolve. Staff have been asked by registrants about what would constitute patient records as well as how to document consultations to ensure accurate information. Further, records management can be a challenge for opticians who have not yet transitioned into an online system. As more patients require access to their patient records, easy search and access to information becomes crucial. Again, more education and refresher around this issue will be useful.

- 5) Collaboration with stakeholders is vital. One of the barriers identified for using the standards is lack of support from employers. The College can collaborate with employers, including those that employ other eye care providers, to educate and support opticians' compliance with the standards.

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<sup>2</sup>Optician Forums are facilitated discussions participated in by registrants to discuss public safety issues. Opticians break-out into small groups to brainstorm solutions to scenarios. They then report back and share their discussion to the rest of the group. The College has organized Opticians Forum on two topics: the aging demographic and technology. The "[Aging Demographic Report](http://www.cobc.ca/my_folders/Opticians_Forum_Reports/Opticians_Forum_-_Dec.13.2013.FNL.pdf)" is available on the College's website, [http://www.cobc.ca/my\\_folders/Opticians\\_Forum\\_Reports/Opticians\\_Forum\\_-\\_Dec.13.2013.FNL.pdf](http://www.cobc.ca/my_folders/Opticians_Forum_Reports/Opticians_Forum_-_Dec.13.2013.FNL.pdf)





## Conclusion

The College's role as a health regulatory body is to assure the public an optician is properly trained and will serve healthcare patients ethically and competently within a defined standard of care. The standards and its corresponding guidelines reflect the minimum acceptable level of performance by all opticians. Updates to the standards regularly occur as a result of changes to legislation, industry, and technology. The standards are further calibrated based on feedback from opticians.

While some of the recommendations in the survey are already incorporated in the College's Strategic Plan, they provided an added push to have these items implemented immediately. For example, the College has included a section in its newsletter about practice scenarios to explain application of the standards in different situations. An Opticians Forum will be organized in October 2015 to brainstorm how standards apply in different scenarios and practice environments. The Forum will include situations identified by opticians in the survey results. An annual seminar about the standards will be a priority since 80% of registrants identified this as a support they request from the College. The College will continue to communicate and collaborate with stakeholders, including, registrants, employers, regulators of other eye care providers, and Opticians Association of Canada to use the standards as a benchmark to meet the standard of care.