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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

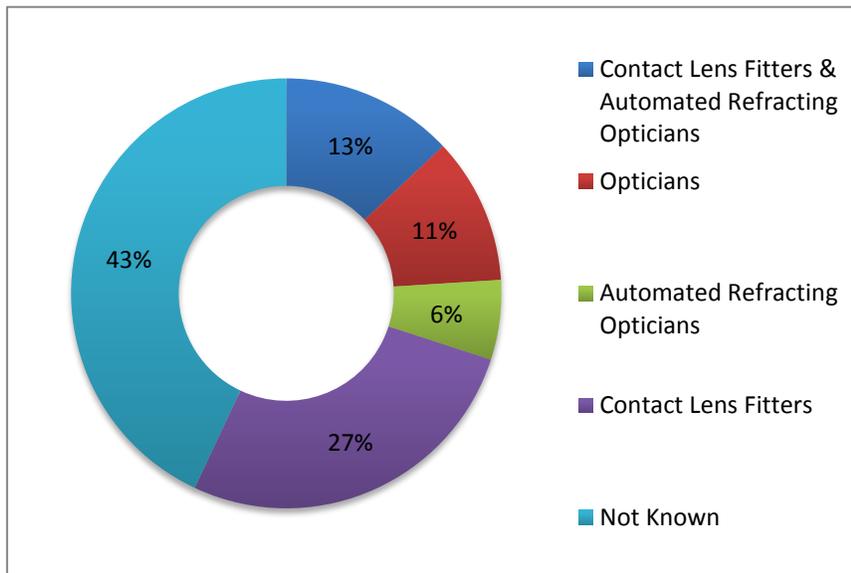
On January 25, 2015, the Board of the College of Opticians of BC directed staff to administer a survey to registrants about their understanding of the Standards of Practice and the support that they need from the College.

The College needed a starting point, a credible baseline data, to focus its energy and resources to areas where they are needed the most by registrants. The intent is to better support registrants whether it be through developing additional standards and guidelines; 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 and/or contact lens fitter that they visit. A copy is published on the College's [website](#).

How we Gathered Information

We 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.



In total, we had 8 items on the standards, which included close (multiple choice) and open-ended

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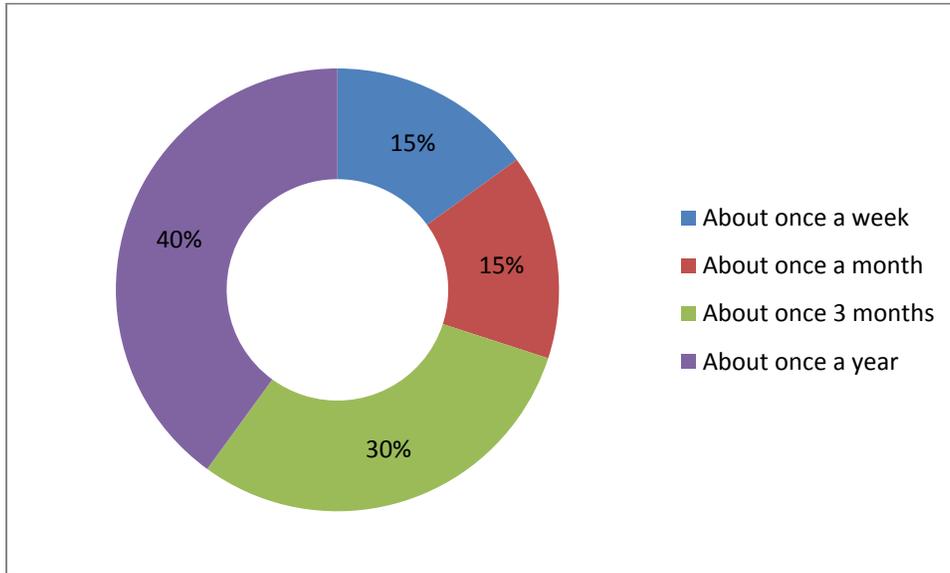


questions. For the close-ended questions, we included a comment field for registrants to add responses that were not enumerated in the choices.

Responses to open-ended questions are not ranked and are 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?



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

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

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

For this question, a number of registrants commented that slight variations in applying the standards in what registrants termed as “grey scenarios” is a challenge. Questions about “expiry” of prescriptions came up a lot in the responses.

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

Topics identified are similar to responses to previous questions e.g. expiry of prescription, box-top contact lens dispensing, 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, a comparison list of what registrants can and cannot do in certain situations. One optician suggested developing a smartphone application (app) for easy access to the standards and other important information from the College. 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"> • Specifics should be provided, e.g. expiry • Dealing with inaccurate PDs from prescriptions
Use of technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online companies and the jurisdiction of the College • Supervision – remote – online dispensing • Use of newer technologies – responsibility
Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication with colleagues, responsibility if there is a complaint
Sight-testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearer standards – dispensing off an assessment record

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 asked about online vision providers and whether they fall within the same standards.

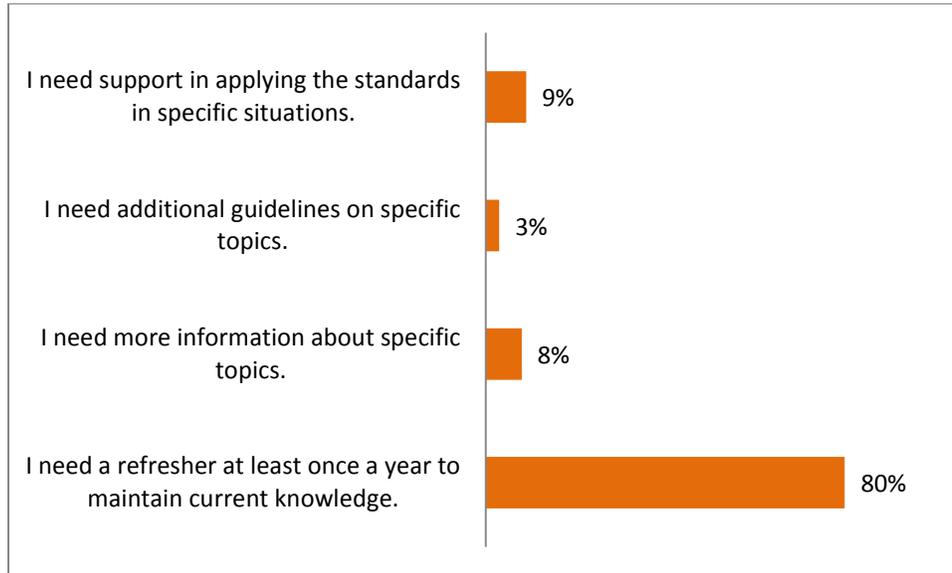
Question 6: What would you consider as barriers for using the standards? Please choose all that apply.

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%

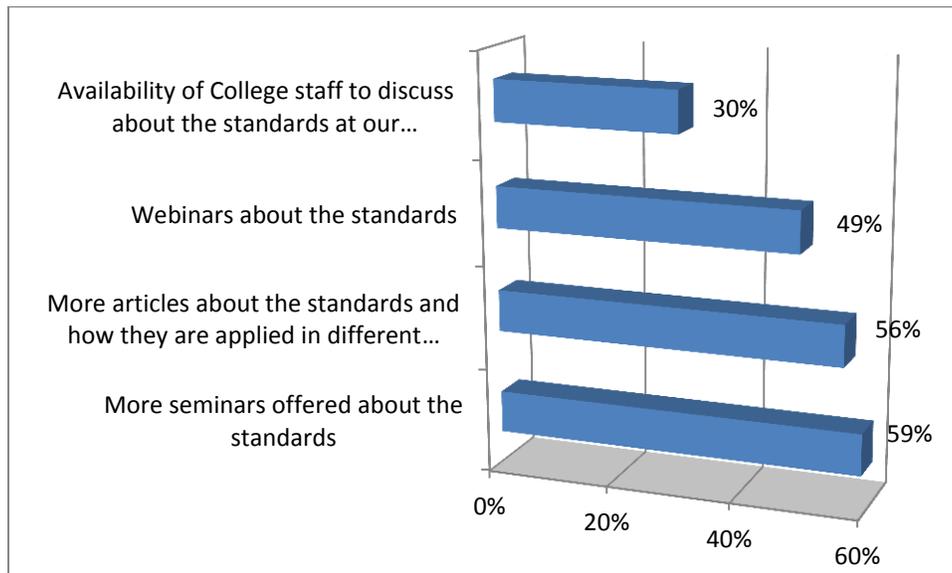
While 33% responded they do not need to consult the standards since they know their responsibilities as opticians, barriers still exist.



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



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





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 topics the opticians often consulted the standards about are the same topics College staff gets questions on from registrants. For the past three years, registrants frequently asked about: 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.

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 a diagram to simplify the decision-making process. For example, a decision-making tree can be developed for different scenarios involving prescriptions.

For many years, College staff has received frequent questions regarding prescription “expiry”. The College has published information about this subject on its website <http://www.cobc.ca/Prescriptions.aspx>. The College’s perspective is that unless there is a contraindication, there is no time limitation for a prescription and opticians are able to dispense from that document. This information can be fleshed out further, e.g. list of contraindications, and how these can be incorporated in the decision-making tree.

- 2) The reality of dynamic practice models brings to the fore the issue of supervision and the responsibilities of opticians over non-licensed staff. Increasingly, opticians find themselves in situations where they are the only regulated professionals on staff. In such situations guidelines are needed to spell out the responsibilities of opticians over patients especially when these patients also interact with non-licensed staff.

College staff has received enquiries about this issue. Opticians want to ensure that their patients receive the best care possible, but sometimes their work situation makes it difficult for them to do so. Aside from being the only regulated professionals on staff, some of them may not be working full-time at a single dispensary.

Prior to this survey, the issue of supervision over non-licensed staff has been discussed at the Board and Committee levels. The Quality Assurance Committee has developed draft standards on supervision over non-registrants for contact lens fitting tasks. In future, this could be expanded to include guidelines on supervision beyond contact lens fitting. The College will work with opticians to

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gather feedback on the draft standards and guidelines to ensure that these can be applied to their practice situations.

- 3) The need for specific 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.

The College has organized Optician Forums about technology, including e-commerce.¹ Opticians' responsibilities do not change whether they are dispensing from a brick-and-mortar store, using e-commerce as an online platform, or a hybrid of both. However, 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 change. Staff has been asked by registrants about what constitutes patient records and how to document consultations to ensure accurate information. Further, records management can be a challenge for opticians who only maintain physical records. As more patients require access to their patient records, easy search and access to information becomes crucial.

The responsibility of the College is to ensure that opticians fully understand their responsibilities surrounding records management. 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 intensify its efforts to reach to employers to help them see the benefits of supporting opticians' compliance with the standards.

¹Optician 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



In summary, the College can support registrants through different ways:

- Standards and Guidelines - Developing additional standards and guidelines in areas where gaps have been identified.
- Education – Using diverse communication channels to educate opticians about the standards: an annual refresher course, webinars, newsletters, and social media. Different aspects of the standards can be featured and information can be presented in easily accessible formats.
- Stakeholder Collaboration – The College will continue collaborating with various stakeholders to ensure opticians are practising according to the standards.
- Access to the Standards – Reminders of where and how to access a copy of the standards and other related information will be helpful to registrants.

Conclusion

The College's role as a health regulatory body is to assure the public an optician is properly trained and will serve 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 in legislation, industry, and technology. The standards are also updated based on practice realities faced by opticians.

The survey results are an important step in gathering significant feedback from registrants. In fact, a number of the suggestions from the survey are in the process of being implemented. For example, the College has included practice scenarios in its newsletter to explain application of the standards in different situations. The College will be organizing an Opticians Forum in November 2015. Opticians will be presented with scenarios they have identified in the survey and will be asked to brainstorm with their colleagues how standards apply. We will also be organizing an annual seminar about the standards since 80% of registrants identified this as a priority. Some of the suggestions from the survey were already included as action items in the College's Strategic Plan.

Registrants' compliance to the standards is vital if professional integrity is to be maintained within the field of opticianry. This distinguishes opticians from non-regulated personnel. The public increasingly understands the difference in care they can expect from opticians compared to non-regulated personnel. To this end, the College will continue to support registrants to meet or even exceed the requirements of the standards. It will also continue its efforts in educating the public of the standard of care they can expect from opticians.