

MEDIA STATEMENT

THE PROFESSIONAL BOARD FOR OPTOMETRY AND DISPENSING OPTICIANS COMMEMORATES OPTOMETRY DAY

24 March 2023

For immediate release

Pretoria - The Professional Board for Optometry and Dispensing Opticians under the ambit of the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) is committed to upholding Council's mandate of protecting the public and guiding the professions. This mandate is also carried out through education and creating awareness on the importance of the optometry profession.

In commemoration of World Optometry Day, that was celebrated yesterday, 23 March 2023, the Board would like to recognise and appreciate the exceptional work that is being carried out by optometrists country wide. Optometrists provide primary eyecare through comprehensive eye examinations to detect and treat various visual abnormalities and eye diseases. As essential health care providers during the COVID-19 pandemic, optometrists bravely waged a fight by continuing to provide eye care services.

Scientific studies have proven that eighty percent of all the information gathering, and human interactions are influenced by what we see around us which underpins the vital role that optometrists play. Second to the brain, the eyes are the most complex organs in the human body and yet they remain among of the most neglected.

Signs and symptoms mentioned below indicate that you may have a vision or eye health problem and a visit to an optometrist is needed to prevent vision impairment and vision loss:

- Double or blurred vision (with or without an existing pair of spectacles);
- Sudden loss of vision;
- Blind spots in your vision;
- Glare or seeing halos around lights;
- Headaches, eye strain;
- redness of the eye;

Protecting the public and guiding the professions

- Persistent or severe eye pain;
- Watery eyes or discharge from the eyes.

Comprehensive eye examinations include assessments for vision threatening conditions such as cataract, glaucoma and diabetic eye disease, among others. It is important to take note that prevention is always better than cure as some eye conditions may result in a permanent loss of vision.

Not all optometrists are Equal

There are different scopes of practise among optometrists. This means that there are different levels of training among optometrists. The categories of registration are as follows:

- i. Independent Practise – not allowed to use (for diagnostic purposes) or prescribe scheduled medications
- ii. Independent Practise – Diagnostics: Allowed to use certain scheduled medications in the course of diagnosing eye conditions.
- iii. Independent Practise – Therapeutics: Allowed to use certain scheduled medications in the course of diagnosing eye conditions. Also allowed to prescribe certain scheduled medications.

What services do optometrists provide?

While all optometrists are trained in basic skills in paediatric (children's) vision, binocular vision, low vision, contact lens fitting and diagnosing eye diseases, some optometrists have areas of special interest in which they have developed additional skills. These may include, but is not limited to, a special focus on paediatric patients, a special focus on binocular vision, sports vision, advanced/specialized contacts fitting and low vision services.

Recent developments in optometry research emphasizes the looming pandemic of myopia (short/near sightedness). Optometrists are the key eye care providers in the prescription of spectacles and contact lenses and play an important role in myopia management, which aims to reduce the rate of development of myopia – especially among children. Have your child's eyes examined and ask your optometrist about how best to manage myopia progression.

Dispensing services

Optometrists are also trained in dispensing of ophthalmic lenses and products however they often work closely with dispensing opticians who play an important role in the fitting and dispensing of spectacles, vision screening and advising patients on appropriate lens products and services.

To ensure that you receive high quality care and advice ensure that your optometrist, dispensing optician or orthoptist is registered with the HPCSA.

The Board values the contributions made by all optometrists within the various communities that they serve and endeavours to ensure that the profession is guided and the public is protected in the provision of optometric services in South Africa.

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About the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA)

The Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) is a statutory body established under the Health Professions Act, 56 of 1974. The HPCSA is committed to protecting the public and guiding the professions. The mission of the HPCSA is quality and equitable healthcare for all.

Further, the HPCSA is mandated to regulate the health professions in the country in aspects pertaining to education, training and registration, professional conduct and ethical behaviour, ensuring Continuing Professional Development (CPD), and fostering compliance with healthcare standards.

To safeguard the public and guide the professions, registration in terms of the Act is a prerequisite for practising any of the health professions registrable with Council.

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