

Media Statement

THE PROFESSIONAL BOARD FOR OPTOMETRY AND DISPENSING OPTICIANS COMMEMORATES OPTOMETRY DAY

19 March 2024

For immediate release

Pretoria – The Professional Board for Optometry and Dispensing Opticians (PBODO), 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, which is celebrated on Saturday, 23 March 2024, the Board would like to highlight and appreciate the ongoing exceptional work that is being carried out by optometrists country wide to improve equitable access to eye care. Optometry as a profession is embracing the need to address the large burden of preventable vision impairment. This year’s theme is “Advancing Optometry’s Commitment to Global Eye Care.”

Vision is our most prominent sense and plays an important role in many aspects our lives. Regular eye examinations are important to detect eye diseases early and help prevent vision loss. Many people think that they have good eyesight until they have their first eye test and are fitted with their first pair of spectacles. A thorough eye examination is important to help identify the cause of vision loss.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has reported that approximately 1 billion people have preventable or treatable vision impairment. The main conditions leading to distance vision impairment and blindness are refractive errors and cataracts. Amongst the 1 billion people with vision impairment, nearly 90 million have distance vision impairment due to refractive errors and 826 million have near vision impairment due to presbyopia. Uncorrected refractive errors are the leading cause of vision impairment among children and adults in all countries around the world.

Refractive errors (a type of vision problem that makes it hard to see clearly) occur when the shape of your eye prevents light from properly focusing on your retina, which is a light-sensitive layer of tissue located at the back of your eye. These errors can be caused by changes in the corneal shape, length of the eyeball and aging of the lens.

There are four main common types of refractive errors, namely:

- Myopia – this condition affects the clarity of vision at a distance, where objects that are far are not clear and objects that are near appear clear.
- Hypermetropia – this condition affects the clarity of vision at both distance and near, although in many patients the vision at distance is not blurred.
- Astigmatism – occurs when there is a difference in curvature on the cornea or lens of the eye, this results in distorted images.
- Presbyopia – is an age-related condition that makes the ability to focus vision on near work such as reading, difficult.

Refractive errors can be corrected by eyeglasses/spectacles, contact lenses, and sometimes refractive surgery. Eyeglasses offer simple and safe correction of refractive errors to give good, clear vision at distance and near. Contact lenses provide good vision at distance and near with a wider field of view than spectacles.

Benefits of wearing eyeglasses/spectacles

- Spectacles help to correct vision impairment due to uncorrected refractive errors. Spectacles are often easier to obtain and less costly than contact lenses or surgical methods of treating refractive errors.
- Tints and Coatings on spectacle lenses help to enhance vision and provide protection against UV rays from the sun.
- Spectacle lenses can offer physical protection from environmental irritants such as dust and wind.
- Spectacles are easy and convenient to use.
- Coatings on lenses can assist with visual disturbances caused by lights from oncoming vehicles during night driving and reflections from electronic devices such as cellphones and computers.
- Spectacle frames can be trendy and fashionable.

It is important to ensure that a comprehensive eye examination is performed, an accurate diagnosis is made and all the risks are considered before deciding on how to correct your vision. An annual eye examination is an important component of having a general annual health assessment done.

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ABOUT THE HEALTH PROFESSIONS COUNCIL OF SOUTH AFRICA (HPCSA)

The Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) also known as Council 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.

The HPCSA is mandated to regulate the health professions in the country in aspects of 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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