
MEDIA STATEMENT

For Immediate Release

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HPCSA and SAOA on Illegal Online and Over-the-Counter Sales of Spectacles and Contact Lenses by Unregistered persons

Preamble

The Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) and the South African Optometric Association (SAOA) are concerned by the increasing trend of various retailers who market prescription spectacles and contact lenses without proper eye examinations by authorised and registered practitioners. This illegal practice poses a serious threat to the health of the public.

Risks to the Public

A comprehensive eye examination by a registered optometrist is an essential pre-requisite to prescribing spectacles and fitting contact lenses. The examination is critical for evaluating vision, detecting eye diseases, and identifying other health issues.

Vision threatening conditions such as glaucoma, age-related macular degeneration (AMD), and certain retinopathies may result in irreversible vision loss if not detected timeously. Although ready-made spectacles (over-the-counter spectacles) may appear convenient, they are not a substitute for a thorough eye examination.

Furthermore, purchasing cosmetic or colour contact lenses from untrained, unqualified, and unregistered persons, in the absence of regular ocular health assessments poses significant risks to ocular health and

vision. These risks include severe eye infections and permanent loss of vision. Proper assessment by an optometrist or ophthalmologist is crucial for maintaining eye health and preventing serious conditions.

Safety and Quality Assurance

Ocular devices and products that are sold by unregistered entities are unregulated and hence are not subject to rigorous quality and manufacturing standards. Poor quality products pose a significant risk to vision and ocular health and should be avoided by members of the public.

Legal and Professional Standards

Issuing prescription spectacles and contact lenses without proper examination by an authorised practitioner violates the Health Professions Act. Only registered optometrists, dispensing opticians, and ophthalmologists regulated by the HPCSA are licensed to prescribe and dispense corrective lenses.

The HPCSA's mandate is to protect the public by ensuring that all healthcare services, including optometry and dispensing opticianry, meet the highest standards of safety and quality. Selling corrective lenses without proper authorisation undermines professional standards and jeopardises the health of the public by compromising the quality of eye care services.

Prescription spectacles and all contact lenses (including cosmetic lenses) are medical devices, therefore the sale of these devices by non-registered persons, in accordance with existing legislation is illegal.

Warning to Unauthorized Outlets

The HPCSA Inspectorate Office and SAOA are collaborating with law enforcement and other regulatory bodies to investigate and take legal action against offenders. We are committed to protecting the public by taking all necessary steps against these unlawful activities by unauthorized, illegal entities.

Appeal to the Public

The public is urged to obtain spectacles and contact lenses only from registered optometrists and dispensing opticians to ensure accurate diagnoses and proper prescriptions. Purchasing spectacles or cosmetic contact lenses from online or in-store unregistered retailers without a thorough examination by a registered practitioner, is not advised. Practitioners' credentials can be verified through the HPCSA's online iRegister. Any suspected illegal activity should be reported immediately to the HPCSA at InspectorateOffice@hpcsa.co.za

Conclusion

The HPCSA and SAOA are dedicated to safeguarding the health and well-being of the South African public. We urge all citizens to prioritize their eye health by seeking care from registered practitioners and avoiding unauthorized illegal eyewear retailers. Together, we can uphold eye care standards and protect the public.

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ABOUT THE HPCSA

The Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) is a statutory body established under the Health Professions Act, 56 of 1974. The HPCSA, also known as "Council", is dedicated to protecting the public and guiding the health professions. Its mission is to ensure quality and equitable healthcare for all.

The HPCSA is mandated to regulate the health professions in South Africa by overseeing education, training, and registration; maintaining 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 with the Council is a prerequisite for practicing any of the health professions regulated under the Act.

ABOUT THE SAOA

The South African Optometric Association (SAOA), formed in 1924, is a professional association registered as a Non-Profit Company (NPC), representing optometrists and dispensing opticians in South Africa. SAOA's membership includes practitioners from various sectors, such as independent practice, group practice, franchise models, and those employed in the public sector, academia, and industry.

The Association's primary objective is to promote and protect the collective interests of its members in good standing, thereby advancing the profession and serving the public interest.

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