

Subject: reply 20 Jan letter
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AHPRA
Optometry Board of Australia
GPO Box 9958
Melbourne VIC 3001

17 February 2011

Dear Sir or Madam

I am writing to the board to vent my utmost umbrage at the suggestion that all optometrists in Australia should be forced to undertake the therapeutics course. I have set out my reasons below:

1. I practice in a country town with 3 full time and another 3 part-time ophthalmologists. We have a good relationship and any urgent referral is seen that day, hence, there is no benefit to any of my patients for myself to initiate therapeutic treatment.
2. An optometrist colleague of mine in the same town has done the therapeutics course. I asked him if he was co-managing any of his glaucoma patients with any of our local ophthalmologists and his reply was simply No, they preferred to manage them exclusively themselves. So after all that study, all that cost, he still refers patients for tertiary ophthalmology care just the same as I do.
3. The brief from OBA said that 20% of Australia's optometrists had been therapeutically endorsed. That means one in five optometrists have voluntarily chosen to do the therapeutics course and now that small minority want to push their view of how optometry should proceed into the future onto the vast majority of those of us who feel tertiary care should be provided by ophthalmology rather than optometry.
4. Optometry is a vision science. We specialize in making people see better. We improve their lifestyle with our skills. We should concentrate on what our original charter is rather than trying to be mini-ophthalmologists.
5. Should this mandatory therapeutics qualification become endorsed, many older optometrists who are performing much needed service within the community, are likely to walk away from the profession rather than be forced to become therapeutically endorsed. All their time-honed knowledge, all that skill lost.
6. Rather than push therapeutics onto optometry, if the board is really concerned with Australia's eye health, they should be pushing for an introduction of the ban on readymade spectacles without first having a thorough professional eye

examination to rule out other underlying eye disease. I suggest that this would save more peoples eyesight every year than for all of optometry to become therapeutically. Endorsed along a similar vein, although to a much lesser extent, would be the legal requirement to produce a current contact lens prescription before purchasing contact lenses over the internet.

7. Optometrists already engage in compulsory professional continuing education. This ensures we are up to date on current medical thinking and most recent treatment modalities. This is sufficient as a primary eye care practitioner to refer to an ophthalmologist for tertiary care a patient who has such needs. It is not necessary that the optometrist instigate tertiary treatment.
8. If optometrists are forced to start therapeutically treating eye disease we run the risk of losing our one big strength, refraction, to Orthoptists. 30 years ago ophthalmologists regularly wrote prescriptions for spectacles. Now they are so busy using their therapeutic skills for such things as glaucoma and wet AMD treatment that they no longer write spectacle prescriptions. People come to us to help them see better, to improve their lives, to enable them to work and even a simple thing like drive a car. If we are pushed into being mini-ophthalmologists I fear we too may become too busy to do the job we were originally trained to do to the detriment of the Australian public.
9. I have already voluntarily embraced change throughout my practice life. I routinely use digital retinal photography, assess corneal thickness using a pachymeter, perform gonioscopy, regularly use slit lamp lenses for dilated fundal examination and use a computerised static perimeter to assess peripheral vision defects. These changes I have embraced throughout my 30 years of practice as I can see merit in their procurement. I cannot see any benefit to myself or my patients for the forced attainment of the therapeutics qualification. I would strongly consider leaving the profession before being forced to complete a therapeutic qualification.
10. I may indeed decide to do the therapeutics course one day when it suits me but I strongly resist the notion that it should be a compulsory requirement for continued optometric registration.

Yours sincerely

Howard Day