TREATMENT OF SELF AND FAMILY MEMBERS

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Treating Yourself

It would be inappropriate for an optometrist to conduct a self-examination. The reliability and accuracy of a self-examination would be in question as it is impossible to conduct a comprehensive eye examination on oneself. Optometrists can't physically acquire the necessary information themselves. For instance, an optometrist will not be able to conduct a binocular vision assessment of themselves, and an optometrist is not physically able to use a slit lamp to examine their own eyes. Ocular pathologies can be missed by attempting to conduct an eye examination on oneself. This type of care would not meet the standards of practice of the profession. Additionally, optometrists are expected to maintain control of the execution of all elements in a comprehensive eye exam and conducting a self-examination eliminates key elements of that control. Optometrists are discouraged from conducting self-exams and from issuing spectacle, contact lens, and drug prescriptions for themselves.

Treating Spouses

As of October 8, 2020, optometrists in Ontario could legally treat their spouses. Ontario Regulation 566/20 (Spousal Exemption Regulation) allows optometrists to provide optometric care to their spouses without this treatment automatically constituting sexual abuse under the *Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991*.

A "spouse" under the Spousal Exemption Regulation refers only to a person whom the optometrist is married to, or a person who has lived with the optometrist in a conjugal relationship outside of marriage continuously for at least 3 years (i.e., a common law partner). It is considered sexual abuse for an optometrist to treat a romantic/sexual partner who does not meet this legal definition of spouse.

While the treatment of spouses is permitted, it is not generally recommended by the College. Personal relationships are complex and incorporating them into professional

care can lead to problematic and unforeseen situations. This is especially true in cases of chronic care that can last over years or decades. If a spousal relationship ends, optometrists may also find themselves in complicated situations that force them to balance the ethics of patient care against the complexities of personal history. The Spousal Exemption Regulation benefits spouses who are treated under special or unique circumstances, such as those living in remote parts of Ontario with limited access to optometric care.

Treating Other Family Members

Optometrists are not prohibited from treating family members, but it is generally discouraged by the College. It would be appropriate for an optometrist to treat a family member during an emergency, for a minor condition or routine reason, or if there are limited options for eye care.

Optometrists should use their professional judgment to determine if they can maintain professionalism and objectivity when treating their family members. Optometrists should also consider whether the familial relationship will interfere with meeting the needs of the patient (their family member) or prevent them from acting in the patient's best interests.

Optometrists must be mindful of the boundary between their professional and personal roles when providing care to a family member and ensure they maintain confidentiality and do not share personal health information about their patient (a family member) to other family members without the patient's consent.