

COLLEGE OF OPTICIANS OF ONTARIO

Environmental Scan

February 2005

**Prepared for the College
by**

J. Davidson-Palmer & Associates Inc.

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COLLEGE OF OPTICIANS OF ONTARIO

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EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

This report presents the findings of an environmental scan undertaken in the early months of 2005 at the request of the College of Opticians of Ontario (COO). It provides a brief overview of current and emerging issues in the broader environment that are of significance to the College in its efforts to develop an effective and responsive strategic plan. The scan is not intended to provide an in-depth analysis of the current situation with respect to vision services but rather to highlight some of the external issues that need to be considered in the College's planning of its future directions.

The methodology used for the scan drew on reports and other documentation, as well as Internet searches of relevant sites such as those of other Colleges, Associations, and Government. It included interviews with a number of key stakeholders in related associations, educational institutions, government, and other Colleges. Interviewees were selected by the College staff as representative of a range of perspectives and were contacted in January and February of 2005. The general discussion guide is shown in Appendix A and the interview list in Appendix B. Interviewees were asked about general issues and trends affecting opticians and optician services at this time, activities and issues related to their own specific organizations, and perspectives on where the College might focus its efforts.

The findings identified a number of issues that either have existed for some time or are emerging or gaining momentum. These include issues related to scope of practice, potential increases in demand due to demographic changes, and lack of visibility and role clarity relative to related groups. In addition, it was noted that lack of information has contributed to conflicting opinions e.g. in regard to supply and demand, as well as to the argument that clients/patients may be confused about the nature of the service provided by opticians. Potential changes in legislation and regulation (e.g. scope of practice), technological changes and other factors could impact the College and its duty to protect the public.

The outstanding question that arises from this scan is identifying the role of the College in these various areas. With its mandate to protect the public interest, what can, or should, the College do to address these issues? The answer to this question rests with the Council and Management of the College. The information contained in this report is intended to assist decision-makers in their undertakings.

INTRODUCTION

1. Purpose of the Scan

The purpose of the scan was to compile information on the external environment that would assist the College in the development of an effective strategic plan. A strategic plan will identify the directions of the College in the next three to five years. To be able to articulate these strategic directions accurately, the College must take into account current and likely future changes in its operating and political environment. In addition, it must determine how it intends to address such changes and, in particular, define its own strategic role. The scan provides baseline information that in turn informs the larger strategic focus of the College and assists in identifying specific initiatives.

2. The Scope of the Scan

The scan covers a range of issues that could be expected to influence and impact activities of the College. The scan looked at demographic trends, technological advancements, scope of practice issues, potential intersects with other related groups, perceived public visibility, and the role of the College. The purpose of the scan, as noted previously, was not to analyze these facets in detail, but rather to identify and highlight their implications from a strategic planning perspective.

3. Methodology

The methodology was designed to obtain information from a variety of sources. This included documentation from organizations such as the Opticians Association of Canada (refracting opticians program), Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (labour information), the U.S. Department of Labor (labor information), Washington State (retinoscopy/refraction), College of Optometrists of Ontario (refraction issues B.C.), Ontario College of Nurses (environmental scan), the Canadian Policy Research Network (environment, human resource implications), the Canadian Nurses Association (issues in nursing), the Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada (planning), Canadian Health Services Research Foundation (planning), and the National Health Service in England (history and services of opticians and optometrists). The College's own documentation (plans, organizational charts, systems information, services, evaluation) was an intrinsic part of this aspect of the review.

In addition to the documentation, interviews/discussions were undertaken with representatives of government, provincial and federal associations, Seneca College, the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and senior management. While the sample was small, the interviewees all held responsible roles in their respective organizations and had unique perspectives on issues impacting the College and its membership.

The purpose of the interviews was to obtain input on issues as well as possible implications for the College. The focus of the interviews was developed in consultation

with senior staff at the College. It included expansion of the scope of practice, visibility, demographic and technological changes and responses to these, human resource planning and issues, roles and responsibilities of opticians, optometrists and ophthalmologists, the role of the College and its focus as well as its organization. It is interesting to note here that the Environmental Scan 2004 undertaken by the College of Nurses of Ontario reported six common themes, among them, the visibility and leadership roles of regulatory bodies, the growing health resource of nurse practitioners including expanding the role and scope of practice issues, patient safety, government demands for accountability, innovations in education, and workplace issues.

The data obtained from various sources was compared to provide a broad picture of the environment facing the College. Because it was never the intent to engage in an exhaustive survey, the methodology focused on key stakeholders and information deemed to have a perspective that was especially relevant to the College.

FINDINGS

Findings are organized under a series of headings that relate to key areas. The issues identified included: expanding the scope of practice, the lack of profile of the College and its role amongst the public and other health care professionals, the status of the relationship of supply and demand for opticians, service delivery issues including freedom of association, the implications of technological change, and internal organizational issues. It should be noted that there are interrelationships among these that have to be taken into consideration in terms of both analysis and impact on strategic planning.

1. Scope of Practice

Expanding the scope of practice was cited as the main issue affecting optician services in Ontario at the present time. The expansion refers to permitting opticians to undertake sight testing that would expand both services to the public and presumably business opportunity. The benefits of such an expansion have been cited as providing greater flexibility of access to services for the public without posing any harm to individuals. The principal negative (re: auto-refraction in B.C.) as cited by the College of Optometrists of Ontario as quoted in a letter to the B.C. Ministry of Health Services dated June 3, 2004, was the issue of missed diagnoses when patients forego a comprehensive oculo-visual assessment in favour of a simple sight test. This College also expressed concern about no reference to quality assurance guidelines in the proposed B.C. amendments.

Interviewees in the environmental scan noted three key issues: (i) that OHIP separates refraction from eye disease as a billable service (Note: subsequent changes to billable services in this regard still in effect distinguish the services); (ii) that having broader availability would serve to capture people into the health care system; and, (iii) that the ethical issues regarding conflict of interest were not as big as previously thought. It was strongly noted that there was no demonstrated risk of harm. One interviewee suggested that the three Colleges concerned need to develop standards around refraction.

It was noted that the College had made significant strides in recent years in carrying out its role. In this context, it was felt that scope of practice was a major issue requiring College leadership.

2. Visibility

The visibility of the College and its role in the protection of the public interest was seen as a major issue by all interviewees. It was acknowledged that the public is not aware of the College and its role, and further are confused by what services are provided by opticians, optometrists and ophthalmologists. It was noted that while the College should not fulfill an advocacy role, it does have an important place in determining competencies,

increasing the scope of practice safely, and in enhancing public awareness in regard to these and other public interest issues. Another aspect of visibility relates to the College's ability to address issues related to the diversity of the population of Ontario. One interviewee commented that the College was lacking in dealing with multi-cultural issues and that Council was not representative of the Ontario public. These comments must be assessed against the reality of the College's performance in these areas. The ability to deal effectively with multi-cultural issues is obviously important to the College's public protection role.

It is interesting to note that the environmental scan undertaken by the College of Nurses (December 2004) referred to undertakings by regulatory Colleges of both teachers and nurses in conducting public opinion polls about their profession and regulatory mandate. In one province it was reported that the public did not understand the role of the nursing regulatory body. Also relevant is that the development of the Nova Scotia model for providing ocular services did not involve opticians and the National Coalition for Vision Health reportedly did not include opticians. The lack of visibility of some professional regulatory bodies in general and of opticians in particular, extends beyond Ontario.

3. Population Demographics

The 2001 Census of Canada indicated slow population growth and aging of the population. The median age had reached 37.6 years in 2001. The population aged 45-64 increased by 36% since the last census in 1996 and the cohort of those aged 80+ grew by 41.2%. (Statistics Canada) At the same time overall population growth had been expected to drop below 1% by 2016.

An increase in demand for opticianry services related to the failing eyesight of an aging population could reasonably be expected. The magnitude of impact of such a change however will ultimately depend on the division of duties between the related professions, the development of technology, and the scope of practice. Monitoring of such changes is important to ensure that any impacts deriving from them are assessed and dealt with.

4. Profession Profile

Interviewees in this scan had conflicting views in regard to supply and demand issues. On the one hand some felt it could be expected that the aging population would increase demand and that the members of the occupation were aging as well, on the other, it was felt that there was no evidence of a lack of available candidates for jobs now or in the near future. Some interviewees did point out that they believed there were shortages in outlying areas, that labour mobility (in and out of province) creates some uncertainties in service delivery and that the need to be open the hours that malls operate creates staffing issues.

Currently there would appear to be limited information on the profile of opticians and the adequacy of the supply vs. the demand. In one province for which statistics were readily accessible it was concluded that attrition, caused mostly by retirement, would be responsible for 91% of the job openings in the occupation over the next few years. They also reported a very limited number of job openings.

The supply and demand issue also has implications for educational institutions in determining the number of educational spaces to be provided and for the College in assessing and delivering its registration and quality assurance functions. Combined with this is the need to further delineate minimum and continuing educational requirements.

The confusion with respect to labour supply indicates the need for more reliable data on the profile of members as well as the demand for services (demographic proxy data) by geographic area. To make sense of this data also requires an assessment of any changes to the delivery of services.

5. Service delivery

At present opticianry services are for the most part delivered through independent businesses owned by individual opticians, through vision chain outlets, and through dispensing departments in large retail operations. In addition to the concerns raised in the previous section, another issue identified by one of the interviewees related to the present situation that an absence of an agreement between the parties prevents opticians from employing optometrists and thereby expanding the scope of their businesses. It is argued that there is a conflict of interest in that the vision test would be undertaken and the glasses provided in the same establishment. However, it was noted by several other interviewees that this situation of conflict of interest already exists in the case of optometrists that provide glasses. It was further noted that the ability for opticians to be competitive was compromised by, (i) the control exerted by optometrists over providing prescriptions to the patient; and, (ii) the fact that dispensing is a controlled act and therefore the optician can't delegate and has to be on-site. The real implication of these problems is unknown since there was no data readily available to confirm the extent of the impact of such issues.

The model of service delivery is also tied in with the distribution of services throughout the province. It was noted by interviewees that some communities are underserved. If there is no optometrist or ophthalmologist to provide sight testing, then it seems plausible that there would be limited opportunity for an optician to establish a business in that area. It was unfortunately not possible to determine at this time the extent of any problems with the distribution of optician services.

To the extent that the service delivery model changes over time (scope of practice, freedom of association, delegation, increased involvement of big business) it could impact the role of the College in its quality assurance, enforcement, and registration functions as well as affect the numbers of members.

6. Technological change

Technological change has implications not only for the profession and therefore for the services of the College in its regulatory role but also for the organizational functioning of the College. Both potential impacts of technological change are discussed below.

Organizational Implications

Advances in information technology provide the opportunity to organizations such as the College to enhance their efficiency and effectiveness in maintaining and analyzing data and in communicating with its members and the public. The electronic exchange of information amongst health care professionals and the public is part of a growing trend.

Some items to be considered by the College in its strategic initiative are potential for on-line membership renewal, enhanced data storage and retrieval, development of data bases that permit ongoing analysis of trends in membership and thereby the ability to provide services to the public, an interactive database with electronic communications for members and employers, and enhanced use of the internet for public, employer and member communications.

Optician Services

Technological change also has implications for members that in turn can impact the College. Automated vision assessment devices may influence the decision with respect to changes in the scope of practice as articulated in the literature. If the scope of practice expands it could affect education, required competencies, and registration categories and processes along with potential changes to service delivery mechanisms.

7. The Legislative Environment

Legislation affects the College, its members and the public they serve directly and indirectly. The mandate of the College derives from the *Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991* and the *Opticianry Act and Regulations, 1991*. Any changes in legislation and regulation or in their interpretation, as originated by the government or another source has potential implications for the College.

- Regulated Health Professions Act

Opticianry is recognized as a self-governing health profession under Schedule 1 of the *Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991 (RHPA)*. The prescription and dispensing of optical aids are controlled acts. The Health Profession Regulatory Advisory Council reviewed the Act in March 2001. Their report affirmed that self-governance of the professions and the system of controlled acts is a fundamental element of the regulatory

system. The report recommended some adjustments to make the system more responsive to the public interest. There were specific recommendations in the areas of complaints and discipline, public communications, committee structures etc. These have potential strategic implications for the College. The RHPA review highlighted the lack of public awareness of how health professionals are regulated. It should be noted that an updating of this review is currently in process.

The lack of public awareness was one of the main findings of this scan as articulated by all the interviewees who felt that the public generally was not aware of the College or its role in protecting the public. Further, there was a consistent opinion that there was confusion amongst the public as to the respective roles of opticians, optometrists, and ophthalmologists. The visibility of the College and understanding of its function is relevant to its ability to effectively carry out its mandate.

It was indicated by some interviewees that there is as well some negative reaction to the regulation of opticians and the role of the College in this regard amongst some individual members. While the Act confers recognition of Opticianry including it among the health care professions, some reportedly view regulation as a problem and see, or have seen, the College purely as an enforcer. The issue would appear to be one of communication with respect to roles and responsibilities, in this case between the College and its members.

Other Legislation

- Privacy Requirements

Requirements to protect the privacy of personal information have been strengthened. For some years greater protection of personal health information has been recommended. (E.g. the Romanow Report) From the College's perspective, there are also implications for the privacy of members' personal data. This is in the context of increased calls for more public accountability as well as potential information technology developments such as on-line renewals. The College has to reassess its legal obligations in light of these changes.

In developing College operational plans and implementing information technology initiatives, it is important for the College to take account of how it can stay ahead of current and potential future privacy requirements while at the same time ensuring transparency and promoting open communications with members and the public.

As noted above all interviewees reported that the College does not have high public visibility. The question that arises from this is can it effectively fulfill a role in providing information to individual public members, not only about the College itself, but also about the provision of services from specific College members and further, is this a function of the College?

Changing the Scope of Practice

As noted above expanding the scope of practice was seen as a major issue by all interviewees and is also a prevalent issue in the literature due to the proposed changes in B.C. Should Ontario proceed in the same, or similar direction, it will require consideration of how to approach legislative change and the guidelines or standards related thereto. The College will have to consider whether or not this will be a core or specialty in terms of registration.

8. Internal Environment

While the external environment was the main focus of the scan, discussions with College personnel suggest a number of internal areas that need to be considered in the strategic plan.

Staffing

The inclusion of some strategic initiatives will have staffing implications. These need to be specifically considered relative to the projects at hand. Communications capacity is particularly important in light of the concerns raised about the importance of visibility and required interactions with various stakeholders. Some of the resource requirements can be met through consulting or contractual arrangements.

Technology

The need to upgrade information technology has been raised by senior staff. In addition some of the demands for certain types of data analysis have implications for capacity building in this area. There are implications for organizational efficiencies and accountabilities, the generation of relevant data, the College's ability to make informed decisions and influence decision-makers, and the College's ability to promote transparency and ensure that the public is aware of its existence and role. Access to information both for the profession and the public is important.

Governance

The Government of Ontario in its review of the College's functioning has made a number of recommendations with respect to governance. Enhancements in the role of Council and its Committees in terms of their involvement in operational directions, decisions and planning activities have been identified and have been, or are being carried out.

Another ongoing issue for any of the regulatory Colleges is the need to ensure a representative and informed Council. This is a challenge in the context of turnover, attracting knowledgeable people and providing adequate orientation to public appointees. As was identified by one of the interviewees, the College needs to be able to address multi-cultural issues.

Space and Location

Space and location have emerged as issues for the College at this time. Staff and record storage space requirements have grown and there is currently a committee looking at the implications of relocation. Considerations in maintaining a centrally-located and visible presence include such issues as visibility to members, government and the public, accessibility to stakeholder groups, proximity to public transit, convenience to ongoing contacts such as members and applicants, hospitals, government agencies, other colleges etc.

IMPLICATIONS FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING

A number of interviewees noted that the College has made great strides in the past few years and is very approachable. The key questions that arise in planning its future strategic directions at this time include the following:

Where should the College be in three years time?

What are the key strategic directions?

What are the anticipated strategic outputs or results?

In its recent strategic planning undertakings the College has identified its key strategic directions and is in the process of confirming the activities that will lead it there as well as the projected results.

The findings of this scan confirm and support many of the initiatives under consideration and suggest some other issues for the College to consider in its strategic planning. As noted at the outset, many of these areas are inter-related and the College may be involved in specific initiatives to a greater or lesser degree. At the outset the College will need to look at its mandate and the degree to which various initiatives and activities contribute to this. How effective can the College be in effecting change in specific areas? The College may decide to take the lead role in some of these areas and to collaborate with, or provide support to, other organizations in some of the other areas.

Scope of Practice

This was a very significant issue for those interviewed and the College was seen as having a pivotal role in facilitating resolution on the issue of expansion of scope of practice. The leadership requirement was seen to include addressing issues such as public safety concerns, public communications, standards of practice or guidelines, educational requirements, mechanisms for registration inclusion, clarification of ethical issues, and interface with the related Colleges and government.

Another issue of this type that was raised here was that of freedom of association i.e. the ability of Opticians to hire Optometrists. It was felt that the College could take a leadership role in resolving this issue.

Visibility and Communications

The scope of practice issue is related to the College and the profession's visibility and communications in that it is perceived that the regulatory role of the College is not understood and that the distinctive services of Opticianry and the other two related professions are confused. There was a perception that the College could be more active in promoting the recognition of the role of the profession generally. It is apparent that the reported need for enhanced visibility and communications goes beyond the scope of practice issue. The need to enhance public awareness of the College, its role and that of the profession is integrally connected to the need to promote transparency generally. In

addition to ensuring a basic knowledge of the regulatory system among the public, the need was identified to promote the confidence of the public in the profession and the College. The College therefore needs a communications strategy that meets both its specific and general needs.

The Utilization of Information Technology and Generation of Information

Information on opticians, their supply and demand, and implications for service to the public were not readily available. The College has one of the most comprehensive databases in regard to some of the required information but it is not produced or reported on a regular basis. Information technology has a substantive potential to benefit the College, the profession and the public in a variety of ways. There are strategic implications in terms of the College's ability to enhance visibility and the public's understanding of the role of the College; to promote high quality care through accessible information; to improve business efficiencies such as in on-line renewals; and to facilitate accountability.

Information technology can make business processes such as renewals more efficient and free up resources for other activities such as communications and quality assurance. IT could help to enhance the quality of care provided by members, for example, through the availability of a central, interactive database and electronic communications for members.

IT provides the potential for the College to better use and analyze the information it currently collects on for example, new registrants, renewals and non-renewals to precisely track what is happening to Opticians in Ontario and to identify potential gaps. The availability of such data strengthens the College's position in dealing with government and stakeholders and in making evidence-based decisions.

Information technology and greater use of the Internet have the potential to considerably enhance communications with the public, with members and with employers and thereby increase the visibility of the College and the understanding of its role in protecting the public.

Internal Enhancements

The College senior staff has identified a number of areas for internal enhancement including improved information technology, dissemination of information, establishment of performance goals and management systems, integrated planning, and utilization of monitoring and evaluation tools. These are consistent with the recommendations of the provincial group that reviewed College operations and governance and with good management.

Conclusions

Based on this environmental scan the key issues to be addressed by the College in its strategic planning initiative have been identified as:

- (i) Providing leadership and facilitating resolution of: (i) the scope of practice issue including addressing key issues such as risk of harm, ethical conflicts, interface with related Colleges and government; participating in the development of standards or guidelines, interfacing with education institutions, determining competency requirements and clarifying registration implications; and, the freedom of association issue through development of policies and guidelines with the other two Colleges.
- (ii) Enhancing visibility and interactive communications with key stakeholders especially the public, government, members and others to better ensure the protection of the public.
- (iii) Clarifying the role of the College and the profession. (Note: these communication activities are associated with, but not exclusively directed to, the scope of practice issue.)
- (iv) Making better use of information technologies to facilitate organizational management, accessibility, interaction, research (including profession information) and promotion;
- (v) Enhanced organizational functioning to ensure good governance and best management practices.

The College's commitment to, and initial development of, its strategic plan has been reinforced by the findings of this environmental scan.

APPENDIX A:

Interview Discussion Guide

College of Opticians of Ontario
Environmental Scan

General Discussion Guide

Name: _____ Position: _____
Organization: _____ Date: _____

J. Davidson-Palmer & Associates Inc. is undertaking a brief environmental scan for the College of Opticians of Ontario in conjunction with a strategic planning exercise at the College. The purpose of the scan is to identify the main issues and trends affecting the profession in Ontario and assist the College in setting and pursuing priority action areas for the coming years. The scan consists of a review of relevant documentation as well as discussions with a number of stakeholders.

1. From your perspective what are the main issues affecting optician services in Ontario right now? (e.g. large businesses, government actions, labour relations, technological changes, compliance with law etc)

What are the implications of these issues for the College and the profession now and in the coming years (e.g. re hiring, type of work, working conditions, qualifications, training, etc)

2. In terms of the broader environment, what are the changes you see that could affect the delivery of optician services in the future (demographics, health care reform, technological change, legislative change, bio-terrorism, public health etc).

3. What are the significant issues in meeting staffing requirements for optician services at the present time?

- 3a Is automation an issue in this field? What is the impact on optician services?

4. Do you see any problems with respect to recruiting and retaining qualified opticians at the present time and what would they be?

- 4.b In the coming years?

5. Is there any need to further define the roles and responsibilities of those who provide optical services?

- 5.b What are the issues that you see with respect to expanding the scope of optician services to include refraction?

6. What do you see as the main role of the College in regulating the profession at the present time? Are there any other areas where you think it should focus its efforts in the future?

APPENDIX B:

Interviewees

Interviewees from the following organizations were contacted and interviewed.

Ontario Opticians Association	Lorne Kashin
Opticians Association of Canada	Mary Field
National Association of Canadian Opticianry Regulators	Maureen Harrison
Ministry of Health and Long Term Care (Ontario)	Lynda An
College of Physicians and Surgeons	Dr. Bruno Gerace
Seneca College	Linda Wren
Vision Council of Canada	Andrea Belanger
College of Opticians of Ontario	Caroline MacIsaac-Power
	Bev Sloan

Other organizations contacted that did not participate were:

College of Optometrists of Ontario
Georgian College

APPENDIX C:

Documentation / Sources

