

## BRIEFING NOTE

**TO:** The Board of Directors

**FROM:** Quality Assurance Committee

**DATE:** July 27, 2020

**SUBJECT:** 6.0 Accreditation Policy

☒ For Decision

☐ For Information

☐ Monitoring Report

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### **Purpose:**

To review proposed changes to the Quality Assurance Committee's Continuing Education (CE) Accreditation Policy and the newly developed checklist for accrediting CE Activities.

### **Background:**

The accreditation process strives to ensure that high quality continuing education is available for all opticians. Accreditation indicates that the accreditation team (professional members of the Quality Assurance Committee) have reviewed the material and determined that it is optician specific and contains an acceptable amount of eyeglass, contact lens, refracting or professional growth content in order to facilitate optician engagement in the Quality Assurance Program.

Currently, when an accreditation request is received from a continuing education provider, the material is reviewed and accreditation decisions are based on content, length, biography of the presenter(s) and other criteria, as outlined in the accreditation policy. When an accreditation request is denied, CE providers may only request a review where they can provide additional information in support of their request.

CE accreditation applies for 3 years from the date the activity is accredited. All accredited activities are eligible for a one-time renewal of 3 additional years when the request is submitted 60 days before expiry.

### **For Consideration:**

At its meeting on April 6, 2020, the Quality Assurance Committee recommended updating the Accreditation Policy to introduce a more rigorous review of course content and the development of a comprehensive checklist for the professional members of the committee to refer to when reviewing materials submitted for accreditation.

At its meetings on April 30, 2020 and June 5, 2020, the QA Committee reviewed proposed updates to the Accreditation Policy (**APPENDIX A**) that would enhance the review of the course content to ensure that it is evidence based, that the CE provider relied on objective, neutral and reliable

sources, and that the primary purpose was the advancement of professional competency and scientific knowledge rather than for the purpose of endorsing a specific product or brand.

A CE review checklist was also developed to assist the Committee in its accreditation review (**APPENDIX B**). The comprehensive checklist is intended as a resource that professional members of the QA Committee will use as a guide when accrediting continuing education activities.

The Committee further proposed an update to the policy to allow CE providers to request a review of the QAC decision in writing within 30 days of the receipt of notice that the QAC has refused accreditation, regardless of whether new information becomes available. This review would be subject to a non-refundable accreditation review fee.

#### *Feedback from CE Providers*

On April 30, 2020 the committee sought feedback from two major CE providers on the proposed updates. The providers were generally in favour of the proposed changes and agreed that they did not believe the College should accredit CE content that markets a particular device or brand.

One of the CE providers felt that it remained important for the College to continue to accredit CE activities that addresses specific products, as long as the presentation is technical in nature and is aimed at educating opticians about product design and use, rather than price or competitive advantage.

The provider noted that various NACOR competencies directly relate to the need for opticians to understand the characteristics of specific products and devices, including:

- 1.7.1 Adapt practice in response to new products and technologies so that suitable options are available to patients.
- 3.11.1 Communicate the advantages and limitations of products to patients clearly and meaningfully.
- 4.6.6 Apply product knowledge to select lens design, material, and modality.

Other areas of concern identified by the CE providers included:

- Some current accredited activities are inconsistent with the proposed updated policy
- Some current accredited activities do not appear to be available to all opticians, as required by the current QA policy
- It is not clear what the College will consider to be “objective, neutral and reliable sources”
- The accreditation review fee applies to all requests for review, even if the QAC ultimately changes their position

#### *Proposed Updates*

In light of the stakeholder feedback, the Committee proposed to further update the accreditation policy to include the following criteria:

- Amending the definition of the eyeglass and contact lens categories to include the statement: “topics in this category would not be product specific”
- Amending the renewal process to remove the one-time automatic renewal of a CE activity when requested within 60 days of expiry. The CE provider must submit an accreditation request for any activity that they wish to have re-accredited and the standard accreditation review fee will apply. The CE activity will be reviewed by the Accreditation Team to ensure it continues to meet the criteria of the policy. The standard Accreditation Review fee will be waived for CE activities that meet the following criteria:
  - the activity was granted accreditation by the QAC between Oct 1, 2017 and October 1, 2020
  - the activity would have been eligible for a one-time renewal of three additional years under the policy as it was at the time of initial accreditation; and
  - the request for accreditation is accompanied by payment of the Accreditation Renewal Fee set out in the by-laws.
- Including the accreditation checklist as an appendix to the policy for providers to review to ensure the continuing education activity meets the required criteria

**Public Interest Considerations:**

The updated Accreditation policy and comprehensive checklist will ensure that Opticians are receiving objective, reliable, neutral, and current education that is technical in nature and will advance their professional competence and scientific knowledge to ensure safe, evidence-based patient care.

**Recommendations/Action Required:**

To approve the updated Accreditation Policy and comprehensive checklist as recommended by the Quality Assurance Committee.

As set out in the Regulations,<sup>11</sup> the College of Opticians of Ontario's (the College) Quality Assurance program consists of Continuing Education (CE) designed to promote the continuing competence and continuing quality improvement of optician registrants. The Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) is responsible for administering the Quality Assurance (QA) Program and determining which CE activities achieve the objectives of the program.

This policy outlines for CE providers the process and criteria by which the QAC will recognize CE as "accredited" activities. The QAC accredits CE solely for the purpose of ensuring that high quality CE is available in order to facilitate registrant engagement in the QA Program. Accreditation of CE does not indicate College endorsement of any products, services or companies associated with the accredited activity.

### Accreditation Process and Criteria

The QAC will consider requests for CE accreditation in the following delivery formats: live presentations (e.g. seminars, lectures, workshops); live-broadcast presentations (e.g. webinar); and distance learning (e.g. internet, videos, print). From time to time, as it deems necessary, the QAC may consult qualified third party professionals to determine whether a CE activity meets the criteria below. CE providers that wish to change the delivery format of an accredited CE activity (e.g. from live presentation to distance learning) must resubmit the course material to the QAC for approval.

The following process and criteria apply to the accreditation of CE activities in **all** delivery formats:

1. The activity must be an organized, evidence-based program that will contribute to the advancement of professional competency and scientific knowledge in the practice of opticianry, and be designed to reflect the educational needs of registrants.
- 1.2 CE providers must identify the competencies covered within the activity (see NACOR Appendix or National Competencies for Canadian Opticians, 4th edition).
- 2.3 Course content must be presented in an objective manner.
- 3.4 Course content must not include any material considered discriminatory under the *Ontario Human Rights Code* and/or unprofessional.

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<sup>1</sup> RHPA, s. 80.1(a)(i) and O. Reg 219/94 8.(1)i.

- 4.5. Accreditation will only be granted to activities that are available to all registrants of the College.
6. CE providers must demonstrate that they have relied upon objective, neutral and reliable sources to support the course content (see Appendix A, Accreditation Checklist).
- 5.7. CE content must have as its primary purpose the advancement of professional competency and scientific knowledge in the practice of opticianry, and must not primarily be for the purpose of endorsing a specific product or brand.
- 6.8. Requests for accreditation must be accompanied by an accreditation request form and the accreditation review fee ~~or renewal fee~~. The accreditation fee is non-refundable, regardless of the QAC's accreditation decision, and is charged in accordance with the College's by-laws and the review timeline requested by the provider.<sup>2</sup>
- 7.9. New CE accreditation requests must be substantially different from any previous CE submission by the same provider.
- 8.10. The CE provider must ensure that all material submitted to the QAC for accreditation is an exact copy of what is actually presented to registrants.
- 9.11. An acceptable CE presenter must be either: a) a *registered* optician, medical doctor, optometrist; b) an instructor at a recognized academic institution; or c) have at least five years of work experience in their field of specialization.
- 10.12. An acceptable CE presenter must not engage in conduct or behaviour that is unprofessional and/or discriminatory.
- 11.13. Accreditation granted by the QAC applies for three years from the date the activity is accredited. ~~Accredited activities are eligible for a one-time renewal of three additional years. Renewals must be submitted to the QAC at least 60 days before the expiry date.~~
- 12.14. CE providers shall supply registrants who participate in accredited CE activities with verification of attendance documentation<sup>2, 3</sup> which serves as evidence of successful completion of the CE activity.
- 13.15. The CE must be approved as accredited by the QAC at the time the course is offered (i.e. the QAC will not back-date any accreditations).

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<sup>2</sup> The Standard Accreditation Review fee will be waived for CE activities that meet the following criteria:

1. The activity was granted accreditation by the QAC between October 1, 2017 and October 1, 2020;
2. The activity would have been eligible for a one-time renewal of three additional years under the policy as it was at the time of initial accreditation; and
- 1-3. The request for accreditation is accompanied by payment of the Accreditation Renewal Fee set out in the by-laws.

<sup>3</sup> Previously referred to as a "Credit Slip"

14.16. The promotion and advertising of CE seminars and conferences must adhere to the criteria as outlined below.

### Professional and Anti-Discriminatory Expectations

In accordance with criteria 3 required of all accredited CE activities, presentation material must not contain any unprofessional or discriminatory content. Any unprofessional and/or discriminatory material identified in an accreditation request will be brought to the attention of the continuing education provider for revision prior to any accreditation decision being made by the QAC.

In addition, the QAC expects all CE presenters to act in a professional manner at all times during the presentation of an accredited activity. CE presenter behaviour will be monitored as outlined in the ongoing accreditation monitoring section of this policy.

The QAC reserves the right to determine what material and/or presenter behaviour is classified as unprofessional or discriminatory.

### Live and Live-Broadcast Presentations Criteria

In addition to the requirements for all CE, the following criteria are specific to CE that is delivered in-person (e.g. seminars, lectures, workshops) or by live-broadcast (e.g. webinar):

1. CE in this category must consist of a minimum actual presentation time (not including set-up or question and answer period) as follows:

| CE Actual Presentation Time | Question and Answer Period | Accredited CE Value Awarded |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| At least 25 minutes         | 5 minutes                  | ½ hour                      |
| At least 50 minutes         | 10 minutes                 | 1 hour                      |
| At least 80 minutes         | 10 minutes                 | 1 ½ hour                    |
| At least 110 minutes        | 10 minutes                 | 2 hours                     |

2. Submissions must include: A biography or curriculum vitae submitted for every presenter; and a complete copy of all media that will be presented (e.g. PowerPoint presentation, videos, etc); and complete information about how the CE provider will endeavor to make the CE available to all Ontario opticians
3. In the case of a **practical workshop**, submissions must include: a list of all of the equipment that is to be used, and the individuals that will provide instruction or guidance at each workstation.

4. In the case of a **live-broadcast**, submissions must include: information satisfactory to the QAC about how optician participation will be tracked (e.g. monitoring registrant log-in/log-out, optician participation in chat forum, etc.)

### Distance Learning Criteria

In addition to the requirements for all CE, the following criteria are specific to CE that is delivered via distance learning formats (e.g. internet, videos, print):

1. CE in this category must consist of written course material that is a minimum of 2000 words or 50 minutes of audio content. Every 2000 words or 50 minutes of audio content will be considered for 1 accredited CE hour.
2. Submissions must include: a detailed description outlining the proposed course content; and a means of assessing optician participation in the CE activity (e.g. a test). Any assessment must contain materials that accurately reflect the activity's content. The submission must also include complete information about how the CE provider will endeavor to make the CE available to all Ontario opticians.
3. Opticians engaging in distance learning CE must achieve a minimum score of 70% on any assessment in order to receive the verification of attendance documentation.

### Verification of Attendance Documentation Requirements

Verification of attendance documentation ensures that opticians are able to accurately track completion of their own CE activities, and are able to provide evidence to the College about their compliance with the QA program requirements.

CE providers must ensure that a registrant has actually attended or participated in 80% of the CE in order to issue the registrant a verification of attendance document.

All CE providers are required to supply opticians with verification of attendance documentation upon satisfactory completion of accredited CE. CE providers may design their own documentation, provided that it contains the following information:

1. The full name, College registration number, and signature of the optician who participated in the activity;
2. The title of the activity and the accreditation activity number assigned by the College;
3. The name of the CE provider, the name of the CE provider's representative, along with their signature and contact information.

## CE Provider Records

The College encourages CE providers to maintain and ensure the availability of attendance records to opticians and the College. The College would recommend that CE providers retain records for a period of 6 years.

## Ongoing Accreditation Monitoring

To ensure the quality, accuracy and professionalism of CE after the materials have been accredited by the QAC, the College may send a representative to attend an accredited activity to ensure presentation content is consistent with the original submission and that presenters are acting in a professional manner at all times while presenting accredited activities. If any inconsistencies between the submission and the presentation are observed or where unprofessional and/or discriminatory content is identified, the QAC will provide the CE provider with notice of its concerns and ask for a resolution. In some cases, the QAC may suspend the accreditation granted until all concerns are resolved.

Where serious concerns present themselves or where a CE provider is unable to rectify any concerns identified by the QAC, the QAC may provide the CE provider with notice of its intention to rescind the accreditation. The QAC reserves the right to suspend accreditation during the notice period. The CE provider will be given at least 30 days to resolve the concerns to the QAC's satisfaction. If the concerns are not resolved by the end of the notice period, the QAC will rescind the accreditation and notify the CE provider.

## Promotion and Advertising of Accredited CE

CE providers of accredited activities offered in Ontario are encouraged to make reasonable attempts to notify all opticians in Ontario of the availability of their CE activities. It is recommended that promotional materials include: information about the educational objectives of the CE, the target audience, the name of the presenter and their credentials, and a complete description of the steps the optician must take to successfully complete the CE.

## Accreditation Categories

The QAC will accredit CE activities for the following categories:

1. **Eyeglasses (EG):** Content may include, but is not limited to: fabrication, fitting techniques, and emerging technology, ~~and product specific topics~~ related to eyeglasses. Topics in this category would not be product specific.



2. **Contact Lens (CL):** CE content may include, but is not limited to: fabrication, fitting techniques; and emerging technology, ~~and product specific topics~~ related to contact lenses. Topics in this category would not be product specific.
3. **Eyeglass/Contact Lens (EG/CL):** CE content may include, but is not limited to: ocular anatomy; physiology of the eye; ocular structures and systems; visual anomalies and the impact on dispensing to patients; low vision evaluation and dispensing; and patient management. Topics in this category would not be product specific.
4. **Eyeglass/Contact Lens/Refraction (EG/CL/RF):** CE content may include, but is not limited to: ocular anatomy; physiology of the eye; the visual pathway; ocular structures and systems; pharmacology and impact on dispensing to patients; accommodation and vision acuity evaluation (including ophthalmic instruments used to evaluate visual acuity); ocular motility; visual anomalies and the impact on dispensing to the patient; low vision evaluation and dispensing; and patient management. Topics in this category would not be product specific.
5. **Professional Growth (PG):** CE content may include but is not limited to topics associated with professional practice such as patient relations, regulatory updates, health and safety, jurisprudence, communications, economic trends to adapt to change, business management, CPR & first aid courses.

### Accreditation Decisions

The QAC may approve, defer or refuse accreditation. The QAC may defer making a decision about accreditation if it believes additional information is required, in which case, the QAC will require the submission of outstanding information within 15 days. A second review fee will not be charged.

The QAC may refuse accreditation to a CE activity if the activity is deemed insufficient, in terms of either its quality, content or in its duration, or if the QAC determines that the CE does not comply with the accreditation criteria. In cases where the QAC refuses accreditation, it will provide the CE provider with reasons for the refusal. The CE provider may request a review of the QAC decision in writing, if new information about the CE can be provided to the QAC within 30 days of receipt of notice that the QAC has refused accreditation. The review is subject to a non-refundable An accreditation review fee ~~is applicable to any subsequent review.~~

## APPENDIX A

## Accreditation Checklist

The following checklist is used as a guide by the Quality Assurance Committee when reviewing application for accreditation. The checklist is provided for guidance purposes only and does not constitute a strict or complete interpretation of the Accreditation Policy.

| Criteria  | Yes | No | N/A | Notes/Comments |
|---|-----|----|-----|----------------|
| <b>Content is evidence based</b>  |     |    |     |                |
| Course contents are supported by data   |     |    |     |                |
| The sources for the data are cited  |     |    |     |                |
| The sources cited are reliable (e.g. scientific journal) and objective (i.e. not sponsored by a person or company with a financial interest in the product)   |     |    |     |                |
| The contents avoid making unfounded/unsupported assertions  |     |    |     |                |
| <b>Content relates to RO competencies</b>   |     |    |     |                |
| The course content reasonably relates to identified competencies for ROs  |     |    |     |                |
| <b>Content is presented in an objective manner</b>  |     |    |     |                |
| Material is presented objectively   |     |    |     |                |
| The contents are presented in a manner that is balanced/neutral   |     |    |     |                |
| Material is generic in nature   |     |    |     |                |
| <b>Speaker/Presenter validation</b>   |     |    |     |                |
| The CE provider has demonstrated that they have relied upon objective, neutral and reliable sources to support the course content   |     |    |     |                |
| <b>Speakers/Presenters meet specified criteria</b>  |     |    |     |                |
| Speaker/presenter is either (a) Registered optician, optometrist or medical doctor OR (b) instructor at a recognized academic institution OR (c) at least 5 years experience in field of specialization |     |    |     |                |
| Speaker/presenter has not previously been reported for engaging in unprofessional or discriminatory conduct during a previous CE presentation   |     |    |     |                |
| <b>Content is not discriminatory or unprofessional</b>  |     |    |     |                |
| Text used is professional and free of content that could considered discriminatory on the basis of factors such as race, gender, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation, etc.                         |     |    |     |                |

|   |  |  |  |  |
|---|--|--|--|--|
| Images used are professional and free of content that could considered discriminatory on the basis of factors such as race, gender, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation, etc.                                      |  |  |  |  |
| <b>Availability</b>   |  |  |  |  |
| CE is Available to all Registered Opticians   |  |  |  |  |
| <b>Proprietary/commercial content</b>   |  |  |  |  |
| The course has as its primary purpose the advancement of professional competency and scientific knowledge in the practice of opticianry, and is not primarily for the purpose of endorsing a specific product or brand. |  |  |  |  |