



# MEMO

**TO:** Council

**FROM:** Fazal Khan, Practice Advisor

**DATE:** May 28, 2018

**SUBJECT:** Prescription Expiry Dates

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## **PURPOSE:**

To consider whether the COO should provide guidance to members and to the public about how opticians are to consider expiry dates when dispensing prescription eyewear.

## **ISSUE:**

*College of Opticians – Website FAQ Section*

Previously, the COO's website included an FAQ that advised members and the public that optical prescriptions did not expire. As Practice Advisor for the College we receive frequent inquiries about whether Rx's expire or whether a member can disregard the expiry date if included on the Rx.

The COO Standards of Practice are silent on this matter.

At some point several years ago, the prior Registrars of the Colleges of Opticians and Optometrists agreed that if an expiry date was included on an Rx that it could be treated as a recommendation. This was placed on the College website as an FAQ.

## **CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS:**

*College of Optometrists – Updated Prescription Standard*

In or around April 2015, the College of Optometrists approved an update to their Standard of Practice with respect to prescriptions (Standard 5.2). Pursuant to this updated standard, optometrists are required to specify an expiry date for all optical prescriptions. Under the

College of Optometrists' Clinical Guidelines, the recommended expiry date is one year for patients under 19 or over 65, and two years for everyone else. Under the Standard, if an optometrist determines to specify an expiry date that differs from the recommended clinical guideline, he or she must communicate the rationale to the patient, so it is understood why it is not appropriate to fill the prescription after the specified date.

Upon consulting with legal counsel, it was felt that counseling our members to disregard Rx expiry dates poses liability and risk issues to our members. The FAQ was suspended.

### *Meeting with the College of Optometrists*

On January 16, 2018, we met with the College of Optometrists' Registrar, Paula Garshowitz, and practice advisor, David Wilkinson to discuss the Prescription Standard and its implications for dispensing opticians. Both Dr. Garshowitz and Dr. Wilkinson confirmed that the requirement to include an expiry date on all prescriptions is no longer optional, and that optometrists are expected to adhere to the Standard. It was also expressed that as prescribers, it was expected that aside from exceptional circumstances, the expiry date should be adhered to by anyone authorized to dispense the Rx.

To date, the College of Optometrists has not developed any standard or guideline with respect to how optometrists are to consider prescription expiry dates when dispensing optical devices.

### *Additional Context – Prescription Drugs*

In order to provide further context to the issue, we have reviewed the practices of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario and the College of Pharmacists of Ontario with respect to prescription expiry.

Under Ontario law, prescriptions are generally not required to include an expiry date, unless they fall within the list of substances covered by the *Benzodiazepines and Other Targeted Substances Regulations*, which are mandated to expire after one year. Accordingly, the CPSO does not have any express policies or guidelines with respect to whether or not physicians should indicate an expiry date on prescriptions for drugs other than those covered by the regulation.

The College of Pharmacists adheres to the Model Standards of Practice for Canadian Pharmacists developed by the National Association of Pharmacy Regulatory Authorities. The Model Standards do not expressly address prescription expiry, however, they state as follows with respect to extending refills:

15. *extend refills on medications for chronic disease only:*
  - *under conditions specified by, and in accordance with authorities granted to pharmacists by, applicable laws / regulations / policies /*

*guidelines, and*

- *when it is in the patient's best interest to do so*

*16. extend refills on medications for chronic disease appropriately, having collected and interpreted relevant patient information to ensure:*

- *the patient's chronic condition is sufficiently stable to warrant extension without evaluation by physician, and*
- *there are no significant drug interactions, contra-indications or adverse effects, and*
- *the medication is still required, and*
- *the dose and instructions for use of the medication are correct, and*
- *that the patient is receiving appropriate monitoring for this medication and chronic disease*

In addition to the foregoing, the CPO includes a fact sheet under its Practice Tools regarding prescription expiry. The fact sheet states, in part, as follows:

*Pharmacists are, at times, required to determine whether it is appropriate to dispense a medication when an extended period of time has elapsed since it was initially prescribed. In the process of exercising his or her professional judgement, the pharmacist considers the patient's history, the legal and ethical circumstances of the prescription and the length of time since a medical assessment has been conducted.*

*...Many pharmacy computer software programs are set up so that all prescriptions expire one year from the date of entry into the computer. It is important to note that default expiry dates, with the exception of benzodiazepines and targeted substances, are often corporate or store policy and should not replace the pharmacist's exercise of clinical judgment and decision-making authority.*

*Additionally, members should be aware that the expiry of reimbursement mechanisms (i.e. Limited Use, Exceptional Access Program) is a separate concern from the clinical necessity for medication therapy.*

## **RECOMMENDATION:**

In light of the mandatory nature of expiry dates on optical prescriptions, it is recommended that the COO communicate the following information to members regarding their obligations when dispensing from optical prescriptions:

*Under the Prescription Standard and Clinical Guidelines put out by the College of Optometrists, all optical prescriptions must specify an expiry date.*

*Opticians are expected to adhere to expiry dates indicated on optical prescriptions when dispensing prescription eyewear. Any divergence from the expiry date indicated on the prescription must be recorded in the patient file, and the optician must communicate the potential risks to the patient and note the conversation in the patient file.*

**ACTION REQUIRED:**

Council is asked to consider the following questions:

1. Should the COO communicate the foregoing information to members?
2. Is the Council in favour of updating the Standards of Practice to reflect this information during the next Standards of Practice Review?