

Blink



The newsletter for AOP members

August 2005

Making friends gaining influence

**If Parliament turns its attention to the GOS this Autumn
we need to be able to argue our case**

by Bob Hughes AOP Chief Executive

Now is the time to make friends where it counts.

Let's face it, we haven't got a very good record. How many LOCs have met with their local MPs? How many PCT Chairmen have been invited to visit a practice to see at first hand the eyecare optometry provides? Other health professionals such as doctors, dentists and pharmacists put a great deal of effort into this, and optometrists and opticians should be no different.



None of this is meant to be criticism, but to demonstrate the basic work that needs to be undertaken if we are to put ourselves in a position to be able to influence if we face unwelcome changes to the GOS later this year. It's a bit like a bank.

Let me paint an ideal scenario for influencing your Member of Parliament:

- LOC Chairman invites the Member of Parliament to visit a well equipped local practice in their constituency.
- MP is met by the practice owner plus a small representative selection for the LOC including an independent optometrist, one from the corporate sector and a dispensing optician.
- After ¾ hour or so being shown how the practice works and the range of equipment and a discussion about local and national optometric issues, the MP leaves impressed with the care being provided to their constituents.

Believe me, MPs like that sort of thing. Regardless of Party or political outlook, nearly every MP wants to take an interest in every aspect of the lives of their constituents, and will be pleased to be invited.

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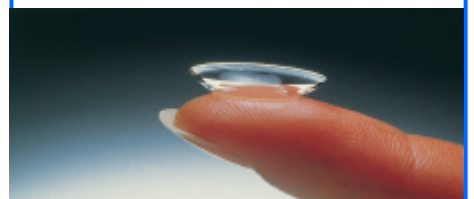
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New contact lens regulations

The AOP will be releasing advice to members on the changes to the sale and supply of contact lenses, in light of recent amendments to the Opticians Act.

The changes mean that plano contact lenses are now subject to the same law as corrective contact lenses. It will also allow lenses to be supplied by anybody under 'the general direction' of a qualified practitioner. Before, the requirement was 'under supervision'. An unresolved issue is whether a qualified practitioner can supply contact lenses with a specification.

The AOP will release the advice in OT and a *Blink* Special Edition in September.



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**AOP members are urged to notify the Association if their e-mail address has changed
All editions of *Blink* are emailed directly to members**

HOW TO INFLUENCE

Hints on how to lobby...

Here are three suggested methods of lobbying:

INVITATION TO A PRACTICE

Invite your MP to visit a practice in their constituency, or perhaps a practice which is run by a constituent. In selecting the practice, try to be practical both in term of location, type of practice and perhaps where the optometrist or owner is sympathetic to the MP's party – or at least able to converse in a friendly way.

It will be worth explaining to the person running the MP's diary that it need not be a long visit, but that you want to show them what contribution optometrists and opticians make to eye health provision locally. They may find it a useful addition if you arrange for someone to take photographs for the local paper.

During the visit, you should explain briefly what services you provide – both NHS and privately; the problems that can be detected by a sight test; additional eyecare services provided and the triaging/PEARS service you could provide if funding were available.

After the visit write a note of thanks.

This is likely to be the most effective method of lobbying and is strongly recommended.

ARRANGE A MEETING

Alternatively, if a convenient time cannot be found for a visit, arrange to meet your MP either formally or informally.

You could perhaps issue an invitation for them to attend part of an LOC meeting to take part in a discussion, or you could visit them at their party offices or wherever the MP holds advice surgeries.

WRITE TO YOUR MP

This is definitely less effective, but if offers of a visit or a meeting are initially rejected, your only alternative may be to try to engage their interest with a letter. You will need to briefly explain the issues in a clear and reasonably concise letter, but one that is long enough to set out the key problems as well as the positive case for optics.

If the answer fails to address your points, then write again politely asking (again) for a meeting, and restating the points that have not been addressed in the first response.



Focus of the National Optometric Conference

By AOP Deputy Chief Executive Richard Carswell

This year's National Optometric Conference will focus on helping optometrists to deal with the local challenges of primary care. The event will contain several highlights, including the launch of the AOP's Primary Care Toolkit for Optometry and a portrait of the dentists' experience in dealing with an increasingly difficult NHS.



The conference takes place at the **Royal York Hotel in York on Thursday 6 October** and is preceded by a reception for delegates on Wednesday evening.

For the first time in recent years, delegates will have a choice of 'parallel sessions' with such varied topics as negotiating techniques, good record-keeping, literature searches, the expansion of optometry in Scotland, cooperation between optometry and ophthalmology, and post-payment verification.

The plenary sessions of the conference will feature Lester Ellman, the chief negotiator of the British Dental Association, and representative of a primary care trust on the toolkit. The toolkit is aid to presenting the business case for the development of primary eye care (see the July edition of Blink for details)

Bob Hughes, making his first appearance at the NOC as the AOP's new chief executive, will outline opportunities facing LOCs in dealing with PCTs, as well as the implications and potential dangers in the government's proposed Health Improvement Bill, due to be introduced in Parliament later this year.

Proposed topics include:

- Launch of the AOP's Primary Care Toolkit
- The professions and the National Health Service
- Panel discussion on Primary Care
- Spreading the influence of Local Optometric Committees
- Questions and answers on direct referrals
- Latest developments on optometry in the National Health Service

Plus

- Panel sessions-morning and lunchtime
- Evening reception on Wednesday, October 5

Delegate fee is £185 inc VAT
Accommodation at the hotel can be booked through
Conference Co-ordination on 01423-720900

Scaling big heights for charity

Two employees from the Association of Optometrists in London will be taking on the challenge of abseiling 400 feet to raise money for the Royal National Institute of the Blind in October.

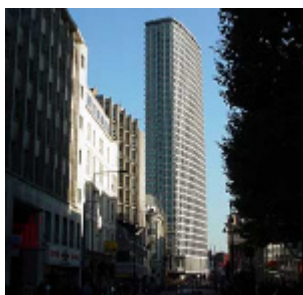
The Association's Head of Business Services Jennie Gambon and Legal Secretary Helen Kalmár are calling on sponsors for the event which involves scaling down the 35 floor Centre Point building in New Oxford Street, Central London.

Jennie Gambon said: *'it's a perfect opportunity for people to make a difference and help us raise vital funds and rebuild the lives of blind and partially sighted Individuals in the United Kingdom— we need to raise a minimum of £500, but are hoping for much more'*

The duo are among 400 other participants who will conquer the giant building on the 8th and 9th of October. They will receive full training on the day of the Event at optional free pre event training sessions at Mile End Climbing Wall in London



Jennie Gambon and Helen Kalmár



Helen Kalmár said

"it is going to be an extremely tough and scary challenge but I know it will be the experience of a lifetime. We hope to rely on you all if not for us perhaps for UK's leading charity which supports anyone with a sight problem. There are around 2 million people in the UK with sight problems and the RNIB helps— not just with Braille, talking books and computer training but with imaginative and practical solutions to everyday challenges"

JUST GIVING

Donations can be electronically made on a simple, fast and secure website the pair developed at http://www.justgiving.com/RNIB_ABSEILhelenandjennie. It is the most efficient way to sponsor: RNIB will receive your money faster and, if you are a UK taxpayer, an extra 28% in tax will be added to your gift at no cost to you. However, if you prefer to donate your money to the AOP they will happily pass it on to the RNIB.

Claiming CET Payments

The Department of Health recently announced that optometrists in England can now claim the funds for participation on CET. The first payment is in respect of 2004 and is £270. The payment is for those opticians and ophthalmic medical practitioners who have undertaken appropriate continuing education and training.

Claims must be made in writing to the appropriate PCT and be made by contractors whether the contractor is claiming for him/herself or for an assistant.

A claim form is on the Department of Health website at www.dh.gov.uk/ophthalmicservices and may be downloaded for completion and submission to PCTS. There is a 3 month period for making claims, which this year runs from 1 August to 31 October. It is expected that the £425 covering 2005 will be claimable next May.

Signatures required on GOS 1 FORM

With the help of the AOP, the Department of Health has clarified the number of signatures which are now required on the GOS 1 form, as follows:

*If the tester and contractor are the same person, he/she signs once.

*If the tester and contractor's authorised signatory are the same person, he/she signs twice. (The signatory indicates the contractor's ophthalmic list number.)

*If the tester and contractor (or contractor's signatory) are different persons, each signs once.

Record Keeping



The AOP Legal Defence Team is constantly urging optometrists to keep thorough records for not just good clinical practice but namely self-defence. *Blink* talks to the **AOP's Head of Legal Services, Fiona Mitchell**

Firstly, why is it important for optometrists to keep a good record when they see a client?

There are three reasons - patient care, it enables you to monitor the trends in your practice but the most important reason is self-defence.

What would you call a 'good record'?

A good record details all the tasks that are appropriate to that patient. It should include writing down what advice you gave the patient, what you said, what you did and what you told to the patient to do.

What are some of the difficulties optometrists face if they have poor records or no records at all?

It is almost impossible to mount a defence. If you don't have the records or they are insufficient you have no defence and the courts will probably side with the patient. There is a very strong correlation between the AOP having to settle matters and pay out because optometrists have poor records.

What advice can you give optometrists on how to keep record books that are efficient and effective?

They need to bear in mind that the extra 2 minutes spent on record keeping will save you hours of stress if someone tries to take you to court. Patients remember the last two words you say to them 'good-bye', they have selective hearing so it is important you keep as full a record as possible - you will appreciate that it is time well spent!

What should you do if you are an employed or Locum practitioner and you leave the business?

You need to ensure that you will be able to obtain access to the records if you are called on to defend a claim, as it will be your problem rather than your employer's if the records are not available in the event of a claim or disciplinary action. It's not just important to keep good records but to make sure your appointment diaries are up to date. If the appointment book shows that the patient did not attend when they say they did - then you are in a much stronger position.

Finally, some practices are 'paperless' and keep computer records rather than hard copies - is there any difference in content?

If you are going to keep your records on the computer you must ensure you have back-up and can access them. If the computer crashes and you can't access your records you might as well say you have no records. You need to make sure the notes are as thorough as those that are taken on hard copies.

AOP Partner Announces New Plan For Car Financing!



Exclusivebenefits plc are pleased to announce the provision of Private Contract Plan (PCP) facilities for car financing.

For a fixed monthly repayment, you choose the car and any optional extras (you can even include full vehicle maintenance). **At the end of the agreed term you can simply hand the car back, or have the option to purchase the car for a fixed, pre-arranged cost.**

Alternately you may wish to borrow money to purchase your next car outright. We have access to rates as low as 6.9% APR for loans of £11,000 and over. This would cost you as little as £262.00 over 48 months, with a total repayment of £12,576.00.

For information on PCP please visit our website at www.exclusivebenefits.co.uk where you will also find a selection of our current offers, which are updated monthly.

If you would like to discuss car finance, or indeed wish to have a personalised PCP quotation for a car of your choice call exclusivebenefits on 0870 01 02 555 or visit our website where you will find a full list of our products and services.



Vision Aid's call for glasses

Vision Aid Overseas is urging Opticians and members of the public to donate children's frames and lenses for its latest project in Ethiopia.

The charity sends teams of volunteer opticians from the UK to poor countries to set up mobile clinics, carry out eye examinations and to dispense spectacles to thousands of children with poor vision.

They have expanded the number of projects for next year from 14 to 18.

To donate children's frames of spherical lenses contact Vision Aid Overseas on: 01293 535016 or log on to www.vao.org.uk

