
Media Statement

PROFESSIONAL BOARD FOR OPTOMETRY AND DISPENSING OPTICIANS COMMEMORATES NATIONAL EYE HEALTH WEEK

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For immediate release

Pretoria –The Professional Board for Optometry and Dispensing Opticians (PBODO) under the ambit of the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) is commemorating Eye Care Awareness month. The HPCSA aims to raise awareness about the importance of eye health, specifically around the prevention and treatment of avoidable blindness. Eye Care Awareness Month is commemorated from 20 September to 17 October.

This month the Board intensifies its efforts to educate the public about eye health, preventable sight loss, and the steps people can take to protect their vision. It is important for the public to understand the importance of regular eye tests, which are essential not only for checking vision but also for detecting underlying health conditions like diabetes and glaucoma.

It is essential to note that the eye care team consists of several well-trained eye care professionals as well as support staff. While each profession has distinct areas of focus, there are overlaps in the services and care that eye care providers offer. The following are differences and similarities of different professionals involved in eye care:

Ophthalmologists - are highly trained medical professionals who use both medical and surgical techniques focused on the detection and management of all diseases affecting the eyes and vision, including glaucoma, cataracts, and laser eye surgery.

Optometrists – are **primary** eye care professionals who conduct eye examinations with the goal of identifying and correcting refractive errors and diagnosing, treating and managing ocular diseases. With the aid of spectacles, contact lenses and other visual assistive devices optometrists aim to provide clear, comfortable vision. In addition optometrists are trained to diagnose and treat disorders related to the focussing ability of the eyes (accommodation) and binocular vision (co-ordinated movements of the eyes) using non-surgical methods.

Dispensing opticians - are eye care professionals who are trained to conduct vision screening, assist patients in the selection of suitable spectacle frames, ophthalmic (spectacle) lenses, advise patients on coatings, tints and other lens treatments and materials designed to enhance vision and ensure that spectacles are well fitted and provide optimum correction. They take facial and other measurements for fitting vision correcting devices and repair and adjust devices to ensure that patients are comfortable. They are also involved in the manufacturing of optical devices.

Ophthalmic lens technicians - are not eye care practitioners. They are semi-skilled technicians who work in optical/ophthalmic laboratories. They are involved in the manufacturing of ophthalmic devices such as spectacles and contact lenses. They are usually vocationally trained (on-the-job training) and do not provide eye care to the public. They may work under the supervision of a dispensing optician or optometrist but may not work directly with the public.

Ophthalmic nurses - are professionals who also hold a certificate in ophthalmic nursing and are registered with the South African Nursing Council (SANC). Their role is to provide basic eye care and screening, at a primary eye care level. They are also trained in eye health promotion and for the advancement of eye health and the avoidance of blindness and visual impairment.

Orthoptists- specialise in the diagnosis and treatment of binocular vision (how the eyes work together) and defects in eye movements and focussing. These problems can be brought on by defects with the muscles that control eye movements or the nerves that are involved in controlling eye movements. Orthoptists have been trained to administer a variety of treatments, such as eye patching, eye exercises and the use of prisms among other techniques.

There are several ways for the public to participate in National Eye Health Week and take steps to protect your vision:

Book an Eye Test: If you haven't had an eye test recently, use the International Eye Care Awareness week as a reminder to book an appointment. Regular eye exams are crucial for maintaining good vision and detecting early signs of eye conditions.

Learn About Eye Health: Educate yourself on the importance of eye health and how to care for your eyes. Understanding how lifestyle choices, like diet and screen time, affect vision can help you make better decisions.

Share Information: Use social media to spread awareness about International Eye Care Awareness week and the importance of regular eye tests. Encourage friends and family to prioritize their eye health by sharing tips and resources.

Attend Local Events: Participate in events, webinars, or free screenings offered by local opticians or healthcare providers during the week. These events often provide valuable information and services at little or no cost.

Promote Eye-Friendly Habits: Make simple changes in your daily routine to protect your eyes, such as taking regular breaks from screens, wearing sunglasses outdoors, and eating a diet rich in eye-friendly nutrients like vitamins A, C, and E.

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About the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA)

The Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) is a statutory body established under the Health Professions Act, 56 of 1974. The HPCSA is committed to protecting the public and guiding the professions. The mission of the HPCSA is quality and equitable healthcare for all.

The HPCSA is mandated to regulate the health professions in the country in aspects pertaining to education, training and registration, professional conduct and ethical behaviour, ensuring Continuing Professional Development (CPD), and fostering compliance with healthcare standards.

In order to safeguard the public and guide the professions, registration in terms of the Act is a prerequisite for practising any of the health professions registrable with Council.

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