

Risk in the optical professions

The GOC required an up to date understanding of risk in the optical professions it regulates to help inform its regulatory work and undertake any future interventions within the sector that are proportionate to the level of risk.

A programme of primary and secondary research was conducted by Enventure Research.

Approach

Primary research to explore perceptions and experiences of risk:

- Online survey of the optical sector
- Qualitative research with registrants and key stakeholders

Secondary research to understand patient concerns and the realities of practice:

- Analysis of GOC's Fitness to Practise data
- Analysis of Optical Consumer Complaints Service data
- Review of relevant literature

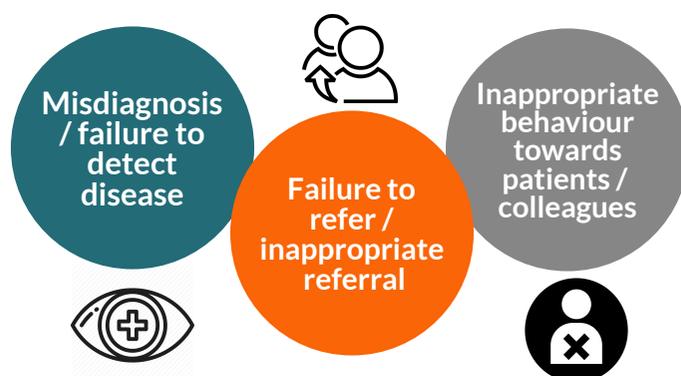
Perceptions of risk - likelihood and severity

Survey questions presented different competency, conduct and contextual risks to respondents, who were able to rate them in terms of their likelihood to occur in practice and potential severity of the risk to patients and the public if they occurred.

Contextual risks viewed as more likely to occur in practice



Competency & conduct risks viewed as having higher potential severity



Perceptions of changes in the sector over the last 10 years and the impact on risk



Scope of optical professionals

An increasingly clinical role could mean increased risk, but this is being managed through education, training and a culture of risk-aversion.



Consumer expectations and behaviour

Patients have increasingly high standards and have become more litigious. They are more likely to visit multiple practices, more likely to purchase online, and more aware of visiting an optical practice for eye health issues.

NHS



The NHS & an ageing population There is increased pressure on an already struggling NHS to meet the needs of an ageing population, moving more services into primary care, requiring practitioners to upskill. Optical professionals are therefore more likely to encounter more complex patient needs.



Technology and artificial intelligence

Reduced risk due to better identification of disease and more accurate records, but potential risks can be found in the ability to interpret results, over-reliance on technology and increased use of automation

Perceptions of risk in the near future



There is a widely held perception that the changes witnessed over the last 10 years will continue into the near future.

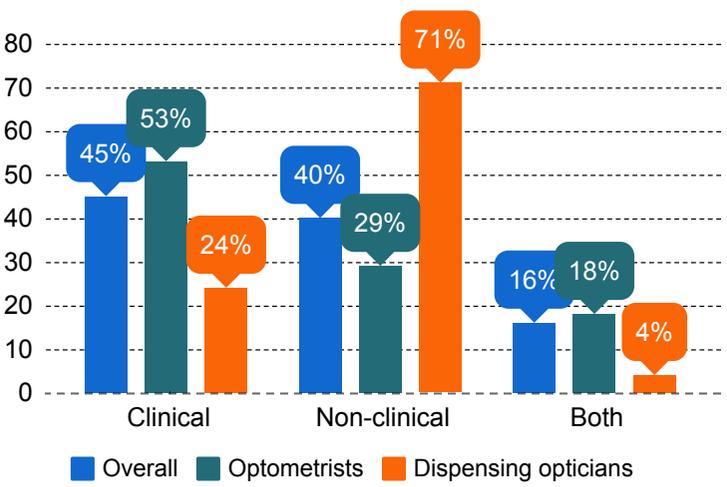
Therefore, current undergraduate education and training and continuing education and training need to evolve and adapt to these changes. If they remain unchanged, this could pose a risk in the future.

Fitness to practise data analysis

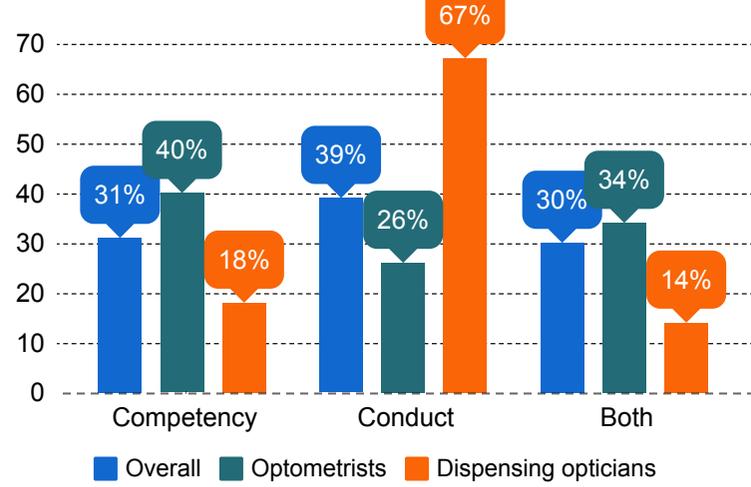
The most common allegations raised in fitness to practise cases



Split between clinical and non-clinical allegations



Split between allegations related to competency and conduct risks



Key conclusions

Optometrists and dispensing opticians continue to be perceived as low risk, with some differences in risk due to professional role or workplace setting.

Competency risks related to disease diagnosis are viewed as more severe. This may be encouraging cautious practice to avoid missed referrals, which may be increasing inappropriate referrals.

Risk of poor communication with patients could become more severe in the future, exacerbated by the perception of time constraints and an increasingly clinical role.

Levels of risk can vary for certain patients, such as children and the elderly. Further training may help to equip practitioners to confidently manage any additional risks posed by these groups.

Undergraduate education and CET need to evolve to manage future risk, better preparing newly qualifieds for practice and fostering development in the sector.

Contextual risks such as time constraints and commercial pressure are perceived as risks more likely to occur and which exacerbate other risk factors.

There is appetite for increasing sharing and learning from FTP data to improve awareness of potential risks and how to avoid them in practice.

It is expected that, as the sector continues to change in the near future, the profession needs to continue to adapt to any changes in risk as it has done over the last 10 years.

For more information

This infographic presents a small selection of the findings of this research. The full report contains a wealth of insight into risk within the optical professions, and can be found in the News and Publications section of the GOC website at www.optical.org