

GOC/COVID/07

Date of statement: 14 April 2020 (updated 1 May 2020)

## **General Optical Council (GOC) statement on optometrists, dispensing opticians and students working in different settings during the COVID-19 emergency**

1. In these extraordinary times, we are fortunate that in all four countries of the United Kingdom we have a group of exceptionally well qualified eye care professionals on whom the general public and fellow healthcare professionals can rely. Uncertain times mean that our registrants<sup>1</sup> may be called upon to work at the limits of their scope of practice and vary their practice for protracted periods of time and in challenging circumstances. While registrants are encouraged to work up to the limits of their competence, refresher training and/or supervision may be needed.
2. Along with all other healthcare regulators, we have signed a [joint regulatory statement](#) which acknowledges that registrants will need to act differently and deliver care in different ways during the COVID-19 emergency in line with Government and public health guidance. We will take account of this in fulfilling our regulatory functions along with the following statement.
3. The NHS and other employers may ask optometrists, dispensing opticians or students to be ready to support the wider COVID-19 response by using their professional skills and experience in different settings in either paid or volunteer roles, back-filling other roles in the health and care sector to fill workforce gaps. This could include:
  - clinical roles in eye healthcare e.g. acting as an optometrist or dispensing optician in a different setting such as a hospital;
  - clinical roles outside of eye healthcare e.g. carrying out clinical tasks in a pharmacy or in a hospital, such as monitoring blood pressure; or
  - non-clinical roles e.g. carrying out non-clinical tasks, such as porter duties or delivering food or medicines.
4. We are aware that the NHS has produced [guidance](#) on the wider roles that optometrists and dispensing opticians could support and as a regulator, we want to support registrants responding to calls from the NHS and others, while maintaining patient safety.
5. When an optometrist, dispensing optician or student is providing support to the wider NHS or healthcare system, the same professional standards apply as in

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<sup>1</sup> Where we refer to registrants in this statement, we are referring to optometrists, dispensing opticians, student optometrists and student dispensing opticians.

any other situation: the test is whether the registrant is appropriately trained, competent, indemnified and (where necessary) supervised for the tasks that they are being asked to undertake. Registrants should also ensure that their own health does not put themselves or their patients at risk by following Government advice on COVID-19.

6. There are many tasks in the wider health service which could be performed by optometrists, dispensing opticians or students drawing on their existing professional skills and experience. Our registrants should satisfy themselves that they are competent to perform the tasks being asked of them or have been / will be given the necessary training, supervision and personal protective equipment (PPE) for them to do so. An employer or the NHS should direct a registrant to appropriate training where this is necessary.
7. When determining which wider roles registrants are able to perform, either paid or as a volunteer, their current scope of practice is a useful starting point. However, it should not in itself constrain optometrists, dispensing opticians and students from supporting the wider COVID-19 response. We expect registrants to use their professional judgement in deciding whether to perform a task which is an extension of their usual scope of practice or outside of the usual scope of practice of the profession.
8. Registrants need appropriate professional indemnity cover for their clinical scope of practice. It is likely that a registrant's professional indemnity will only apply where they are carrying out their usual role of an optometrist or dispensing optician.
9. If registrants are redeployed into non-eye healthcare roles they may no longer be working as an optometrist or a dispensing optician and therefore should not identify as such. Where healthcare professionals are working for the NHS, the Coronavirus Act 2020 may provide indemnity cover for liabilities incurred by healthcare professionals while working beyond the scope of existing cover. Where professionals are not working for the NHS, their employer may provide separate cover.
10. For some non-clinical roles, indemnity insurance may not be required at all.
11. In all cases, registrants should ensure that they check with their insurance provider, NHS authority or other employer, that coverage is in place by one route or another. Guidance is available from the optical professional bodies <sup>2 3 4 5</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.college-optometrists.org/the-college/media-hub/news-listing/coronavirus-2019-advice-for-optometrists.html?utm\\_source=social-media&utm\\_medium=graphics&utm\\_campaign=COVID-19](https://www.college-optometrists.org/the-college/media-hub/news-listing/coronavirus-2019-advice-for-optometrists.html?utm_source=social-media&utm_medium=graphics&utm_campaign=COVID-19)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.abdo.org.uk/coronavirus/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.aop.org.uk/coronavirus-updates>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.fodo.com/>

**The GOC will keep this statement under review**

12. Next routine review due: not later than 31 January 2021<sup>6</sup>.

NO LONGER APPLIES

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<sup>6</sup> This statement was reviewed on 1 June 2020 and no changes were made other than to the review date in paragraph 12.