



Australian Society of Ophthalmologists

MEDIA RELEASE

Australian Society of Ophthalmologists Incorporated ABN 29 454 001 424

Patient wellbeing at risk with new optometry powers

28 March 2013

Australians diagnosed with glaucoma by optometrists may have their sight put at risk given new clinical authority granted to optometrists by themselves.

The Australian Society of Ophthalmologists (ASO) has expressed its deepest concern at a new ruling by the Optometry Board of Australia (OBA) and the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA).

The ruling permits optometrists to independently diagnose and treat the serious eye disease glaucoma without oversight by ophthalmologists. An ophthalmologist is a medical doctor who has undertaken additional specialist training in the diagnosis and management of disorders of the eye and visual system.

This overturns successful collaborative care of glaucoma by optometrists and ophthalmologists as has happened for more than ten years.

ASO President, Dr Arthur Karagiannis, today said glaucoma is the leading cause of irreversible blindness worldwide and must be diagnosed by a medically-trained ophthalmologist with treatment also overseen by an ophthalmologist.

However, the new ruling enables optometrists who have a mere 50 hours of clinical training in therapeutics to undertake specialist assessments that have traditionally been the responsibility of ophthalmologists who undergo a minimum of 12,000 hours of clinical training.

Australian patients have an expectation that medical conditions will be treated by medical practitioners. Without patients knowing, this best practice standard of care has now been cast aside.

Dr Karagiannis said: "Ophthalmologists must and will continue to work closely with optometrists but the responsibility for diagnosis and treatment of glaucoma ultimately must rest with medically-qualified specialists.

"Australians would be disturbed if they realised their precious gift of sight could be jeopardised by an insufficiently experienced health practitioner diagnosing and treating their disease instead of a fully-trained medical specialist.

"The decision by the OBA is seriously flawed because it has not been objectively scrutinised by a panel of acknowledged clinical experts. This overturns decades of accepted medical practice in this country for determining clinical standards."

All correspondence: PO Box 1300 Spring Hill Qld 4004

President: Dr Arthur Karagiannis

Chief Executive Officer: Mr Kerry Gallagher



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The ASO calls on the Ministerial Council of federal, state and territory Health Ministers to overturn the OBA ruling and restore traditional clinical standards to protect patient safety and wellbeing.

For further information or comment, please contact: ASO President, Dr Arthur Karagiannis.

Please initiate contact with ASO Director of Strategy & Policy, David M. Russell on 0466 359 617.

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