



Australian Society of Ophthalmologists

MEDIA RELEASE

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Patient safety endangered by glaucoma decision

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Legal action has been launched in the Supreme Court of Queensland to protect patient safety and wellbeing from changes to the role and responsibilities of optometrists.

The Australian Society of Ophthalmologists (ASO) and the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists (RANZCO) are jointly bringing an application to the Supreme Court seeking to set aside decisions of the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) and the Optometry Board of Australia (OBA) which attempt to extend the scope of practice allowing optometrists to diagnose and treat glaucoma without ophthalmic oversight.

This overturned traditional medical practice in which ophthalmologists, who are medical doctors, have overseen patient diagnosis and treatment for glaucoma.

The concern is that optometrists with just 50 hours of therapeutic training have been approved to assess medical conditions that are beyond their learning and experience.

By contrast, ophthalmologists study for seven years to become doctors and then spend another seven years studying their specialist discipline as eye surgeons.

The Australian Medical Association has described the initiative as out of step with the experts on best patient care for those suffering glaucoma which is a serious eye disease affecting 300,000 Australians. The ASO and RANZCO state that it is essential for patient safety and wellbeing that scope of practice extensions by health practitioners are only implemented if endorsed by expert clinical review.

In a 119 page affidavit filed in the Supreme Court in support of the application, Mr Gallagher, CEO of ASO, has stated "ASO holds grave concerns that patient safety will be compromised by optometrists treating glaucoma without medical and specialised supervision and in circumstances where optometrists are not sufficiently trained to do so."

In bringing the action, the ASO and RANZCO are seeking a reversion to the collaborative co-management regime of treating glaucoma that was in place before OBA amended the optometrical scope of practice.

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