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MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 26, 2020

TO: All Arizona Licensed Optometrists

FROM: Arizona State Board of Optometry

RE: Practice/Office closures; Executive Orders; COVID-19 information/guidance

The Board held a special board meeting on Thursday, March 26, 2020 to discuss the emerging state issues regarding the COVID-19 public health emergency and voted to issue this memorandum to the licensed Arizona optometrists.

Arizona Revised Statutes §32-1704(B) explicitly prohibits the Arizona State Board of Optometry (“Board”) from regulating how an optometrist manages a practice in Arizona. Therefore, the Board is unable to advise or mandate practice closures, even due to epidemic or pandemic issues.

There have been some guidelines provided by both the American Optometric Association (“AOA”) and the Centers for Disease Control (“CDC”). The Board encourages you to review said guidelines and make a determination as to what you wish to do regarding your practice.

If you are not closing your office, please make sure to update your practice information! Amidst the confusion created by COVID-19, some businesses are making changes to their schedule without letting their patients know. Practices should be taking the time to update all modes of practice communication so your patients know how to contact you if they need information. This includes but is not limited to updating your office voicemail message, detailing office hours, providing emergency contact information and phone numbers, rescheduling appointments and advising patients regarding the procedure on how to get a prescription extended or refilled (this includes contact lenses!). This can also be done via email to your patients. Even if these changes are only temporary, it keeps business running smoothly and minimizes upset patients caused by misinformation. Moreover, it is not appropriate to leave your patients without the resources to get their eyewear or medication prescriptions at any time.

Statement from AOA:

The AOA continues to closely monitor developments and actively participate in U.S. public health discussions to date regarding the COVID-19 response to keep optometry informed of the latest information. Doctors of optometry need not only understand the risks and current public health situation related to COVID-19 but also have the latest clinical recommendations and guidance for informed patient care.

On March 17, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued a public health reminder with recommendations aimed to prioritize urgent and emergency visits and procedures in its continued efforts to stem the COVID-19 outreach. The AOA swiftly provided guidance to doctors of optometry.

The AOA recommends that doctors of optometry be aware of the COVID-19 situation in their communities and be mindful of the commonly understood characteristics of this virus, as well as patient exposure risk and how optometric practices should respond.

For additional information and resources on COVID-19, visit AOA's COVID-19 webpage:
<http://www.aoa.org/Coronavirus>

Doctors of Optometry, Optometry students and Optometric staff with questions, concerns and comments can contact the AOA at 1-800-365-2219 or e-mail President@AOA.org.

Information on Contact Lens wear during COVID-19; FAQ <https://www.aoa.org/contact-lens-wear-during-covid-19>

Again, please visit the AOA and CDC websites to get information on how to manage patients and practices during this time. There are a number of resources that you can print out and post in your offices as well.

On March 12, 2020, Arizona Governor Doug Ducey issued a State Declaration of Public Health Emergency related to COVID-19. Governor Ducey subsequently issued several Executive Orders regarding the COVID-19 virus and how the Office of the Governor is helping practitioners, boards, commissions, schools, city, state and municipal agencies and the citizens of Arizona during this crisis. You may find the Executive Orders on the Governor's website at <https://azgovernor.gov/executive-orders>.

These are extraordinary times and we are all in uncharted waters. Do your best to stay calm, stay safe and be there to help if/when your patients need your assistance and expertise.

Please direct all questions or concerns to Ms. Margaret Whelan, Executive Director, Arizona State Board of Optometry via e-mail at margaret.whelan@optometry.az.gov or 602-542-8155.