

## **SAOA STATEMENT ON THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC AND THE IMPACT ON THE PROFESSIONS OF OPTOMETRY AND DISPENSING OPTICIANS**

***AT THE TIME OF DRAFTING THIS POSITION, THE LIST OF ESSENTIAL SERVICES AS DEFINED BY THE NATIONAL OF HEALTH HAD NOT YET BEEN RECEIVED.***

***IRRESPECTIVE OF THE LIST, TO ENSURE THE PROTECTION OF PRACTITIONERS , THEIR FAMILIES AND PATIENTS FROM EXPOSURE TO THE SCOURGE OF THE COVID 19 VIRUS, IT IS THE VIEW OF THE SAOA THAT OPTOMETRIC PRACTICES SHOULD BE CLOSED FOR THE DURATION OF THE LOCKDOWN PERIOD AND RESTRICT THEIR SERVICES TO URGENT AND EMERGENT CASES IN ACCORDANCE WITH GUIDELINES STIPULATED BELOW.***

The SAOA fully supports the Government in their plight to combat further community spread and a wider outbreak of the COVID – 19 viral disease. Also, of critical importance are immediate efforts to assure continued access to essential health care, including urgent and emergent care and to reduce current and expected burdens on emergency departments.

**Urgent care** is defined as care provided for conditions or situations which require prompt attention but are typically not of such seriousness as to require the services of an emergency room; this would include (eg) broken spectacles.

**Emergent care** is defined as care for conditions requiring prompt attention due to a sudden change in the eye or visual health such as sore, scratchy eyes or contact lens complications.

As frontline (primary) health professionals, with ethical obligations to patients, Optometrists should use their professional judgement, based on the immediate eye health needs of patients to determine the timing of care, including assessing patient expressed urgency. In this regard, the following guidelines are presented:

- **Practices should be closed for the duration of the lock down period**
- **In the case of urgent emergent situations, contact details are to be readily available to patients on voice mail, websites and clearly displayed at practices.**
- **The necessity for a consultation to be assessed each time**
- **All non- essential care (non-urgent and non-emergent) be rescheduled until after the lock down period**
- **Print your HPCSA card and keep it with your person at all times, especially when travelling**
- **The principle of impeccable hygiene is to be observed at all times.**

For those members of the SAOA who experience financial difficulty or human resource challenges, the SAOA will make available professional assistance and guidance to ensure compliance with the legislation and, where applicable, to benefit from the rescue options put in place by Government. For enquiries in this regard, SAOA members are welcome to contact Harry Rosen on 084 482 4517 at any time.

The South African Optometric Association (SAOA) is closely monitoring developments and will actively provide updates regarding COVID-19 to ensure that optometrists and Dispensing Opticians

as well as the general public not only understand the risks associated with this pandemic but also have the latest information available for continued patient care.

The SAOA's priority is to support the health and safety of the public and the optometric community and will continue to assess the situation and update recommendations accordingly.

Stay Safe

Best Regards,

SAOA TEAM