

ECOO Position Paper on Contact Lenses

The European Council of Optometry and Optics has great concerns about the unregulated sale of contact lenses by non-qualified sellers and from the internet, especially those with a plano prescription for cosmetic use. The reasons for these concerns relates to the risk potential, which may be sight threatening, that can arise with wear of any form of contact lens if patient compliance is lacking or professional management is inadequate.

Contact lens related complications occur because of a wide range of causes including simple lifestyle matters such as smoking and age¹ but the major ones are non compliance and extended lens usage. Given a population of some 25 million wearers in Europe, even rare reactions can affect a large number of wearers.

Understanding the epidemiology of lens related disease, particularly with the introduction of new lens types and modalities, is crucial for professionals to enable an informed choice of lens modality, wear schedule and hygiene requirements to be made. Emerging risk data over the last decade has indicated that careful observation is important during the early period of lens wear and that early adopters of new technologies may show different patterns of risk.²⁻⁷

Regulations are designed to protect consumers from eye health problems by ensuring that opticians, optometrists or ophthalmologists are involved in the prescribing and selling of contact lenses. Proper safeguards should be in place from the start of the process, from the initial fitting through to the long-term management of the wearer.

The fitting of any contact lens must only be done by an eye care professional who has the knowledge and ability to assess and evaluate the relevant tissues of the ocular surface for contra-indications and safe use in conjunction with having an up-to-date spectacle prescription. The contact lens design, material and care regime are carefully selected by the contact lens practitioner to meet the requirements of the individual. On dispensing the lenses daily management of handling and care is discussed as wearing a defective lens may compromise the eye and cause subsequent problems⁸ whilst non compliance with the care regime can cause devastating effects.⁹ Once worn the person needs to be seen at regular specified intervals to review lens wear, care regimes,

vision, lens fitting and ocular surface integrity. The contact lens wearer has to be encouraged to follow their practitioner's recommendations and be advised of the adverse reactions that can occur. At aftercare visits appropriate remedial action may be needed and only fully qualified opticians, optometrists or ophthalmologists are capable of providing this service.

Individuals purchasing their lenses over the internet appear to be less likely to follow the usual recommendations for their eye health.¹⁰ They also seek less follow-up visits which is worrying as frequent examinations are a vital part of a contact lens wearer's preventative health care routine. Cases have been reported which illustrate the implications of the unauthorized sale and unmonitored wearing of decorative cosmetic contact lenses resulting in ocular complications.^{11,12,13} Most needed hospital admission as they experienced acute vision-threatening infections and inflammation.

Wearing a plano lens for decorative reasons is no different to wearing a powered contact lens for visual reasons. The risks are the same but the consequences seem to be more as these are the persons buying over the internet or from an unregulated seller and so are less likely to have sought the proper care and advice that is needed to minimise the problems associated with contact lens wear. Regulation of supply of all lenses and the practitioner will minimise the inevitable risks of ocular changes due to contact lens wear.

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