
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Health Services

CHANGES TO HEALTH PROFESSION ACT IMPROVE ACCOUNTABILITY

VICTORIA – Over the next seven months, the professions of pharmacy, chiropractic, medicine, dentistry and optometry will transition under the Health Professions Act, providing a consistent approach to health profession regulation in B.C., announced Health Services Minister George Abbott.

“The designation of these five professions under the Health Professions Act modernizes the legislative framework for these professions and is one way for us to improve the quality and efficiency of the regulation of health professions in this province,” said Abbott. “These changes will help ensure accountability and transparency and support high-quality, patient-focused care.”

The College of Chiropractors of British Columbia and the new College of Optometrists of British Columbia will be the first two self-regulating professional colleges to move under the Health Professions Act on March 1, 2009. The College of Optometrists will replace the current Board of Examiners in Optometry. The College of Pharmacists of British Columbia will transition on April 1, 2009, followed by the College of Dental Surgeons of British Columbia on April 3, 2009 and the College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia on June 1, 2009.

“Streamlining the regulation of B.C.’s health professions under one act stems from recommendations made in a 2001 report by the former Health Professions Council,” added Abbott. “A number of steps were involved in the transition process, including repealing the individual pieces of legislation that governed each profession. We have been pleased to work closely with the regulatory bodies throughout this complex process.”

To enhance patient choice, the Province has also proposed changes to the Optometrists Regulation around prescription disclosure. If implemented, these changes would require that a copy of a prescription for glasses be given to a patient free of charge and that the prescription not state or imply that only an optometrist can dispense eyeglasses. If contact lenses are fitted using the prescription information, a copy of the contact lens specifications must also be given to the patient free of charge.

The proposed amendments to the Optometrists Regulation will be posted on the Ministry of Health Services’ website on Dec. 12, 2008. Regulatory bodies, stakeholders and the public will have 30 days – until Jan. 12, 2009 – to provide feedback on the proposed changes. If implemented, the regulation will take effect on Mar. 1, 2009.

In the last year, the Province has made a number of significant changes to open up the health profession regulatory process and protect patients. As of Nov. 1, 2008, all health profession colleges currently governed by the act are required to provide the public with information about disciplinary actions taken against health professionals.

Additionally, the Health Professions Review Board, which will have the ability to review the timeliness and outcome of health regulatory college decisions, will open in March 2009.

B.C.'s Health Professions Act currently covers 15 self-regulated health professions. These include: dental hygienists; dental technicians; denturists; dietitians; licensed practical nurses; massage therapists; midwives; naturopathic physicians; occupational therapists; opticians; physical therapists; psychologists; registered nurses (including nurse practitioners); registered psychiatric nurses; traditional Chinese medicine practitioners; and, acupuncturists.

The Province recently announced that, effective April 1, 2010, the professions of audiology, speech-language pathology and hearing instrument dispensing will be brought under the act through a new regulatory college for speech and hearing professionals.

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