



ACO ADVISORIES

TERMINATING THE OPTOMETRIST-PATIENT RELATIONSHIP ADVISORY

Effective January 1, 2008

Revised May 15, 2012

Revised June 22, 2016

Revised April 20, 2020



TERMINATING THE OPTOMETRIST - PATIENT RELATIONSHIP ADVISORY

One of the more challenging activities in the professional career of any health care provider is finding an appropriate and proper way to terminate a relationship with a patient.

An optometrist who terminates a relationship with a patient must have reasonable grounds for doing so. Reasonable grounds does not include discrimination on age, failure to keep appointments, gender, insurance coverage, marital status, medical or visual condition, national or ethnic origin, physical or mental disability, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation or socioeconomic status.

It is the opinion of the Alberta College of Optometrists:

- That an optometrist may legally and ethically terminate the optometrist-patient relationship as long as the patient is not in acute need of immediate care or emergency care; and, the patient has been given reasonable notice to find another optometrist or ophthalmologist for their continuing care.
- That an optometrist may legally and ethically immediately terminate the optometrist-patient relationship under extraordinary and limited circumstances such as:
 - a. The patient poses a safety risk to the optometrist, office staff or other patients.
 - b. The patient is abusive to the optometrist, office staff or other patients.
 - c. The patient fails to respect professional boundaries.
 - d. The optometrist is immediately leaving practice due to personal illness or other urgent circumstances.
 - e. The optometrist is limiting their practice to a specific area or specialty area of optometric practice. For example, an optometrist who decides to limit their practice to geriatric patients, contact lenses, etc.

Optometrists are responsible for the following when terminating the optometrist-patient relationship:

- To clearly communicate the decision for terminating the relationship (in writing) to the patient and document the reasons in the patient record.
- To give your patient a reasonable time period to find another optometrist or ophthalmologist. Although, it is not mandatory for an optometrist to locate another optometrist or ophthalmologist for the patient to continue care, the Alberta College of Optometrists encourages optometrists to do so, if possible.
- After receiving written notification from the other practitioner to assume care of the patient; ensure that all parties understand that the custodianship of the patient file is now the responsibility of the practitioner who has accepted care of the patient.