

CONSULTATION – PROPOSED PRESCRIBED QUALIFICATION FOR SPECIALIST OPTOMETRIST SCOPE OF PRACTICE – OPHTHALMIC LASER SURGERIES

Released: **10 November 2021**

Submissions Due: **22 December 2021**

Introduction

- 1 The principal purpose of the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003 (the HPCA Act) is to protect public health and safety by ensuring that health practitioners are fit and competent to practise their professions. In accordance with this, one of the key functions of the Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians Board (the Board) is to prescribe scopes of practice and their associated qualifications necessary for the provision of safe care by the profession within these scopes.
- 2 The Board is currently consulting on a proposal to gazette a **new** specialist scope of practice in accordance with section 11 of the HPCA Act. This consultation document, including a comprehensive background detailing the reason for the proposed new scope, can be found on the ‘Consultations’ page of the Board’s website under ‘Publications and Resources.’ Submissions close on **22 December 2021**. The proposed scope of practice is as follows:

“Specialist Optometrist Scope of Practice - Ophthalmic Laser Surgeries”

An optometrist registered in the Specialist Optometrist Scope of Practice - Ophthalmic Laser Surgeries is authorised to perform specified ophthalmic surgical procedures below the mucous membrane or surface of the skin. Specifically, they are authorised to perform:

- a. *neodymium:yttrium-aluminum-garnet (Nd:YAG) laser capsulotomy; and/or*
 - b. *neodymium:yttrium-aluminum-garnet (Nd:YAG) laser peripheral iridotomy in an approved hospital setting.*
- 3 Once the Board has described the contents of the profession for the scope of practice, it must then prescribe the qualification/s or experience of one or more kinds, or both, required for the scope of practice. In doing so, the Board may designate one or more of the following as qualifications for a new scope of practice:

- a. a degree or diploma of a stated kind from an educational institution accredited by the authority, whether in Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ) or abroad, or an educational institution of a stated class, whether in NZ or abroad
 - b. the successful completion of a degree, course of studies, or programme accredited by the authority
 - c. a pass in a specified examination or any other assessment set by the authority or by another organisation approved by the authority
 - d. registration with an overseas organisation that performs functions that correspond wholly or partly to those performed by the authority, and
 - e. experience in the provision of health services of a particular kind, including, without limitation, the provision of such services at a nominated institution or class of institution, or under the supervision or oversight of a nominated health practitioner or class of health practitioner.
- 4 This consultation document sets out below the proposed qualification/s or experience the Board intends to prescribe for the proposed *Specialist Optometrist Scope of Practice – Ophthalmic Laser Surgeries*.

Background

- 5 As detailed in the consultation proposing the new *Specialist Optometrist Scope of Practice – Ophthalmic Laser Surgeries*, primary NZ optometric training currently includes:
- human biology with a focus on the eye and adnexa;
 - extensive training in light, geometric, and physical optics;
 - mastery of optometric examination practical skills, such as the use of slit lamp biomicroscopes, mirrored contact lenses and prisms (e.g. gonioscopes), and binocular indirect ophthalmoscopes.

Optometrists are also trained to identify and manage abnormalities in the eye, and to recognise the signs and symptoms in a patient that requires referral to a surgeon. Many optometrists are working in post-operative care and will be routinely detecting and managing adverse outcomes following surgery. However, no aspect of surgery is currently part of the optometric curriculum.

- 6 In performing surgery, in addition to learning new skills, there are additional risks and benefits that need to be fully appreciated by a clinician so that they can competently undertake specific ophthalmic surgeries. The working environment and frequency of practice of an optometrist typically differs from that of a surgeon, therefore restrictions on which optometrists and working environments may be

suitable to such an expanded scope need to be considered and regularly audited as part of on-going competency assurance.

7 In considering the possibility of specified ophthalmic laser surgeries being undertaken by the profession, the Board determined that a pilot programme would be needed to test whether an optometrist would be able to acquire and demonstrate the skills and knowledge required to safely and competently perform specific ophthalmic laser surgical techniques. The Board, therefore, partnered with one of the main DHBs to conduct such a pilot, which has just successfully concluded.

8 The pre-training requirements for optometrists participating in the pilot were:

- Be registered with the Board in the Optometry Scope of Practice.
- Hold a current Annual Practising Certificate with no conditions on practice.
- Have worked in a District Health Board ophthalmology department for a minimum of three years with at least 400 hours as a clinician in the relevant clinic (i.e. 400 hours in a cataract clinic for capsulotomy, and/or 400 hours in a glaucoma clinic for peripheral iridotomy).
- Have formal arrangements with a registered consultant ophthalmologist in the same workplace, who has agreed to train and supervise the optometrist in the relevant surgery.
 - Any changes to the supervisory environment must be approved by the Board before any further training is undertaken. The pilot must stop until the approval has been received.
- Be able to meet the current and on-going auditing requirements specific to the surgery in which the candidate optometrist wishes to begin training.
- A declaration attesting to meeting these requirements needed to be submitted to the Board prior to undertaking formal training.

9 An optometrist applying to be approved to undertake the training in the use of ophthalmic lasers for conducting ophthalmic laser surgery requires additional knowledge which is not formally taught as part of the training required for the *Optometrist Scope of Practice*. Therefore, any optometrist undergoing the pilot was expected to gain and ensure they had specialised knowledge of the following:

- Comprehensive knowledge of the relevant anatomy and physiology of the eye and adnexa.
- Knowledge of the physics of light and laser, and the penetration of light through ocular tissues.
- An understanding of the interaction of light and living tissue including thermal effects, photocoagulative effects, photoablative effects and photodisruptive effects.
- Knowledge of the wavelengths and powers utilised in ophthalmic lasers for the specific surgery.
- Knowledge of required sterile techniques for performing laser surgery.

- Knowledge of surgical procedure and specialised equipment.
- Knowledge of the risks and benefits for each surgery.
- Knowledge of appropriate management plans for adverse outcomes.

10 Further specific details of the pilot can be found in the consultation document proposing the new *Specialist Optometrist Scope of Practice – Ophthalmic Laser Surgeries*. The pilot programme was supervised by 2 Ophthalmologists (Dr Hussein Patel and Dr Andrew Riley) with oversight from the clinical director of Auckland DHB Ophthalmology (Dr Sarah Welch). The pilot was noted by the supervisors as being well structured and all procedures were carried out in a safe manner with positive outcomes and no adverse events reported. In reviewing the feedback from the Ophthalmologist supervisors and patient logs submitted, the Board was reassured and satisfied that the required pre-requisite learnings, additional observed and supervised training will provide the skill required to safely and competently perform specific ophthalmic laser surgical techniques.

The Proposal

11 In line with the pre-training requirements, and additional requisite knowledge and skills needed for participation in the above-mentioned pilot, and Board proposes to prescribe the following qualifications for registration in the ***Specialist Optometrist Scope of Practice – Ophthalmic Laser Surgeries*** in accordance with section 12 of the HPCA Act:

“The optometrist must satisfy all of the following requirements:

- *Hold registration in the Optometrist Scope of Practice and not be subject to any conditions; **and***
- *Have worked in a hospital ophthalmology department for a minimum of three years with at least 400 hours as a clinician in the relevant cataract and/or glaucoma clinic (as applies); **and***
- *Have demonstrated their understanding and comprehensive knowledge in the specified areas of competence for the safe delivery of ophthalmic laser surgeries published on the Board’s website (Pathway 6 – Specialist Optometrist – Ophthalmic Laser Surgeries) to the satisfaction of their supervising ophthalmologist; **and***
- *Have satisfactorily observed the minimum required number of surgeries being performed by their supervising ophthalmologist published on the Board’s website (Pathway 6 –*

*Specialist Optometrist – Ophthalmic Laser Surgeries), attested to by their supervising ophthalmologist; **and***

- *Have satisfactorily and independently performed the required number of surgeries under the supervision of their supervising ophthalmologist published on the Board’s website (Pathway 6 – Specialist Optometrist – Ophthalmic Laser Surgeries), attested to by their supervising ophthalmologist.”*

How to have your say

12 The Board welcomes submissions from any and all stakeholders and interested parties. If you wish to make a submission on the proposed **prescribed qualifications** for registration in the proposed **Specialist Optometrist Scope of Practice – Ophthalmic Laser Surgeries**, please provide this in writing **on 22 December 2021**. The Board does not guarantee that submissions received at the Board’s offices after this date will be considered.

13. **Submissions be sent to:**

Elmarie Stander

The Registrar

Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians Board

PO Box 9644

Wellington 6141

Email: registrar@odob.health.nz

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Registration pathways document (Pathway 6)