

Optometrist fails to provide services of an appropriate standard

21HDC01773

In a report released today, Deputy Health and Disability Commissioner Deborah James found the standard of services provided by an optometrist breached a woman's rights under the Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights (the Code).

The woman, in her mid-seventies, had a history of cataracts in both eyes and bilateral retinoschisis¹ and had regular eye checks at the clinic. Concerned that her cataract was getting worse, she saw an optometrist who conducted an eye examination and prescribed new glasses.

Around a year later, the woman saw an ophthalmologist who diagnosed a long-standing retinal detachment of her right eye. At that stage, the condition was beyond treatment and resulted in partial blindness.

Ms James accepted the advice of her clinical advisor that a dilated pupil examination was clinically indicated in the circumstances. In addition, she said that a check of visual fields and visual reflexes are part of the comprehensive eye examination that was expected by the optometrist's employer and the Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians Board (ODOB) standards.

While Ms James was unable to make a finding about whether the woman's retinal detachment was present at the time of the examination, she concluded that failure to detect the detachment was made more likely due to the lack of dilated pupil examination.

Ms James was critical that the optometrist did not provide a dilated pupil examination, as the accepted standard of care for someone in the woman's clinical circumstances. Accordingly, she found the optometrist breached the Code for failing to provide services of an appropriate standard | Tautikanga.

Since the event, the optometrist has reviewed her practice, including the ODOB and New Zealand Association of Optometrists (NZAO) clinical standards and guidelines to ensure that she will carry out a dilated pupil examination when appropriate in the future.

Ms James made several further recommendations for the optometrist, outlined in the report.

30 September 2024

¹ An area of retina separated into two layers.

Editor's notes

Please only use the photo provided with this media release. For any questions about the photo, please contact the communications team.

The full report of this case can be viewed on HDC's website - see HDC's '[Latest Decisions](#)'.

Names have been removed from the report to protect privacy of the individuals involved in this case.

The Commissioner will usually name group providers and public hospitals found in breach of the Code unless it would not be in the public interest or would unfairly compromise the privacy interests of an individual provider or a consumer. More information for the media, including HDC's naming policy and why we don't comment on complaints, can be found on our website [here](#).

HDC promotes and protects the rights of people using health and disability services as set out in the [Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights](#) (the Code).

In 2022/23 HDC made 592 quality improvement recommendations to individual complaints and we have a high compliance rate of around 96%.

Health and disability service users can now access an [animated video](#) to help them understand their health and disability service rights under the Code.

[Read our latest Annual Report 2023](#)

Learn more: [Education Publications](#)

For more information contact:

Communications team, Health and Disability Commissioner

Email: communications@hdc.org.nz, Mobile: +64 (0)27 432 6709