The Board of Optometry (board) has recently received complaints about contact lens prescriptions written to expire in less than two years. At an April 12, 2017 public meeting, the board decided to send this notice to each licensee as technical assistance. This information is for educational purposes only, and does not relate to a specific disciplinary matter.

As an optometrist and contact lens prescriber, you must follow contact lens prescription law and rule requirements. Most of these rules are in the Consumer Access to Vision Care Act (RCW 18.195) and the Consumer Access to Vision Care rules (WAC 246-852). Failure to follow these laws and rules may be deemed “unprofessional conduct” under the Uniform Disciplinary Act (RCW 18.130).

When you write a contact lens prescription that expires in less than two years, these laws and rules require:

1. The ocular health of the eye must warrant an expiration date of less than two years.

2. You must document all contraindications in the patient’s medical record.

3. At the time of the examination, you must provide the patient a verbal explanation of the contraindications and why they justify the contact lens prescription to expire in less than two years. In the patient’s record, you must document that you provided this verbal explanation.

4. At the time of the examination, you must provide an explanatory notation in the patient’s record of why a contact lens prescription has an expiration date of less than two years.

Here are some examples that describe how these rules would apply:

1. A prescriber writes a one-year contact lens prescription for Patient A. This one-year contact lens prescription was written pursuant to an “office policy” that all contact lens prescriptions for adults be written to expire in one year.

   The Board believes this policy is not compliant with the contact lens prescription laws and rules. This type of blanket policy may result in Patient A receiving a one-year contact lens prescription that is not warranted by the ocular health of the eye.
2. A prescriber writes a one-year contact lens prescription for Patient B. This one-year contact lens prescription was written pursuant to an “office policy” that all contact lens prescriptions for new adult patients be written to expire in one year.

The Board believes this policy is not compliant with the contact lens prescription laws and rules. For the reasons identified in the first example, this type of blanket policy may result in Patient B receiving a one-year contact lens prescription that is not warranted by the ocular health of the eye.

3. A prescriber writes a one-year contact lens prescription for Patient C after a contact lens examination and follow-up appointment. During the contact lens examination, Patient C was diagnosed with corneal neovascularization. The prescriber records the corneal neovascularization diagnosis in Patient C’s record, and gives a verbal explanation to Patient C about why a one-year contact lens prescription is warranted by the ocular health of the eye.

The Board believes this is not compliant with the contact lens prescription. The prescriber did not provide a notation in Patient C’s record that a verbal explanation was given for the one-year prescription, and the prescriber did not write an explanatory notation in the patient’s record that a one-year contact lens prescription was written because of the corneal neovascularization caused by contact lens over-wear.

These hypothetical scenarios should not be construed as legal advice, nor should they be considered an exhaustive list of all situations you may encounter in your practice. We hope this guidance helps you comply with the rules related to contact lens prescribing.

If you have questions, please contact Loralei Walker, Program Manager, at 360-236-4947.