



B.C.'s Occupational Vision Program

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The BCOA's occupational vision committee has adopted the model set forth by the national committee and, with a few minor adjustments, has created a program that is catching the eye of safety personnel around the province.

Although the economic climate has slowed progress, since its inception in April 1979, a step by step movement towards our goal has occurred. Third Party Chairman Dr. Brian Cox carried the load almost exclusively until the Association hired Mr. Tom Little part-time in July 1980 after Mr. Little left CAO's P.R. department to move to Vancouver. Dr. Cox spent a good deal of time in working with Mr. Little to contact industry and union officials, (as well as insurance brokers for the other third party priority, pre-paid family vision plans).

During this period, the Association's first formal contract was signed (June 1981) with Alcan Smelters and Chemicals of Kitimat, covering a work force of 2500 employees. In February 1982 the Association hired Mr. Little as full-time Program Director to advance the Third Party programs as well as public relations, government liaison, and general administrative tasks.

With the help of a nationally-produced 10 minute film, promotion of the OVC program increased. Before describing our promotional efforts, a brief outline of the BCOA program is in order:

The emphasis is on the quality of occupational vision care:

- * Complete case history including lighting, hazards and visual demands of the job (may require on-site survey).
- * Complete oculo-visual assessment based on visual needs at work, irrespective of whether off-the-job requirements are different.
- * Careful adaptation of the occupational prescription to the appropriate CSA lenses and frames (employer may designate suppliers or rely on optometrist's judgement).
- * In the case of "plano" lenses, determine that CSA standards are met and ensure proper fit.
- * Check prescription lenses and frames when returned from lab.
- * Dispense eyewear and counsel patient on proper care, limitations, and potential pitfalls of the eyewear and its use, (even planos must become personal safety devices if they're going to be used).
- * Undertake follow-up care as needed.
- * Once a contract is signed with BCOA, billing for services rendered is sent by the optometrist to the Association office where it is checked and one monthly statement from all practitioners is sent to the employer. When BCOA receives payment it forwards the correct amount to each optometrist.

This entire process enables an employer to see the difference between professional care and the non-professional programs available

— obviously as much emphasis must be placed on both examining *and* dispensing to convince employers to purchase the entire package. This is where the 10 minute film has played a key role. It graphically underlines the value of professional care and points out that compliance, and therefore safety, improves with the program.

The BCOA tries to keep members up to date on recent developments in occupational vision care since the program can't succeed unless all members can respond to workers' changing needs. A good example is the increased use of Visual Display Terminals (VDT's). We encouraged our members to attend the AOA symposium in Edmonton last April and then reported highlights in our newsletter, plus offered tapes of selected lectures. Ideally, a similar symposium on occupational vision will be held in B.C. in the near future.

We can not overemphasize the importance of keeping up to new developments: 1982 CSA Standard (Z94.3-M1982), new lines of safety eyewear, coatings, new lighting standards, effect of work environment on patient's visual welfare, contact lenses in industrial environments, etc.

As of this writing*, the BCOA had four contracts in place: Alcan, Westcoast Transmission Co. (the large pipeline and refining company

*Editor's Note: Since this article was prepared, the BCOA has added Westmin Resources Ltd., a division of Noranda Mines on Vancouver Island employing some 400 people, to its list of contracts, bringing the total to five.

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affecting some 820 workers in about 30 communities), Ocelot Industries Ltd. of Calgary (operating a Methanol plant in Kitimat with several hundred employees) and the Petro-Canada refinery (in Taylor, B.C. employing several hundred people).

Altogether close to 4,000 people are eligible for service. Because of the local nature of all but the Westcoast contract, precise figures are impossible to provide, however with the Westcoast contract alone, the potential for the program is apparent. After a year of discussion and considerable input from the BCOA, Westcoast signed on May 11, 1982. Internal problems prevented the company from launching the program until October, but a separate agreement was also signed with Alberta for about 50 employees there.

As of July 15 the BCOA had processed \$3638 in optometric billings to Westcoast in December, February, April and monthly billings up to July. The average bill was \$42.80 per patient for 85 patients. Eighteen optometrists have billed a total of 31 times.

In the course of promoting a professional eye safety program, contact has been made with more than just employers and unions. An education process has begun with Worker's Compensation Board, B.C.

Safety Council, Occupational Health Nurses, Safety Officers' education courses, CNIB, government departments, safety suppliers and others. In general, the public relations value of the program has been a great benefit for all optometrists.

Another aspect of OVC promotion is the need for flexibility. Although the program calls for a mandatory eye examination, this can become a labour relations problem for employers and unions. It is also true that employers must pay for third party initiated exams, whereas employees who choose to have their eyes examined independently are covered by the provincial Medical Services Plan. Thus the voluntary approach is often more appealing.

Another area requiring flexibility is the provision of plano eyewear. Many employers feel justified in spending a substantial amount on prescription lenses, but refuse to do so for non-prescription. We will accept contracts for the former, while maintaining that the latter is still important. This way a company can discover and appreciate optometric services, perhaps opting for plano service later on.

We are now looking at ways of attracting companies to enlist in the plano program, as none currently do. One suggestion has been to permit

employees to come in with a pre-selected pair of planos for checking and fitting. This would be done at a reduced fee, but would require an evaluation period to determine the effectiveness of this approach.

On the other hand, a renewed emphasis will be put on explaining the importance of optometric judgement and counselling in the proper selection and fitting of plano safeties in spite of the cost. From both a physical and psychological point of view, this is clearly the path that will solve employers' problems with employee non-compliance and/or improper safety eyewear.

Our future plans are to revamp our OVC literature and continue to educate industry on the importance of professional care. A \$30 levy was approved at our February Annual meeting, providing a further \$6000 for OVC promotion, which will permit extra travel and publicity. We hope to expand committee membership to include optometrists from various parts of B.C. A special program for VDT's is to be incorporated as well. All in all, with economic recovery slowly returning, we look forward to a productive second half of 1983, and a solid future for the development of the Occupational Vision Program.

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