

Florida Medical Association FACT SHEET



OPTOMETRISTS SHOULD NOT BE AUTHORIZED TO PRESCRIBE ORAL MEDICATIONS

FMA Position

The FMA is strongly opposed to increasing the scope of practice for optometrists in relation to the drug prescribing. A patient who requires a prescription for an oral medication should be under the treatment of a physician to ensure that the condition is being appropriately diagnosed and treated. There is no reason to expand the current scope of practice of optometrists.

Discussion

The bill as drafted will allow optometrists to prescribe ALL drugs, even those that they cannot currently prescribe topically. But the bill should be opposed even if it is amended to cover only those drugs that an optometrist can currently prescribe topically.

Optometry programs offer limited academic and clinical prescribing experience to its students. Conversely, ophthalmology resident students have over 15,000 patient encounters before graduation. Ophthalmologists have the necessary skills to understand the complexities of drug prescribing. The optometry profession does not have any such training program.

In 1986, the Florida legislature gave optometrists limited authority to utilize certain ointments and drops for certain eye problems. The legislature was keenly aware that optometrists were not medical doctors and lacked training to treat systemic diseases. The legislature, therefore, set up statutory safeguards to protect the public. Those safeguards include the following:

- Prohibited an optometrist from "prescribing, ordering, dispensing, administering, supplying, selling, or giving any systemic drugs . . . " . Section 463.014(3), Florida Statutes.
- Mandated that optometrists closely monitor patients that have been given creams and drops and refer patients to "medical specialists" in the event of an adverse reaction. Sections 463.0135(5)-(8), Florida Statutes.

THE FOLLOWING ARE SYSTEMIC ORAL EQUIVALENTS OF DRUGS NOW AUTHORIZED FOR OPTOMETRISTS TO ADMINISTER BY CREAMS AND DROPS, AND THE POSSIBLE ADVERSE REACTIONS.

Diclofenac, ketorolac, other nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory agents

Gastrointestinal bleeding and perforation

Liver toxicity

Congestive heart failure (potentially fatal)

Impaired blood clotting

Suppression of bone marrow (potentially fatal)

Kidney failure (potentially fatal)

Erythromycin, azithromycin, other macrolide antibiotics

Pseudomembranous colitis (potentially fatal inflammation of colon)

Interaction with other drugs including theophylline, digoxin, benzodiazepines, cisapride (potentially fatal)

Ofloxacin, ciprofloxacin, other fluoroquinolone antibiotics

Suppression of blood formation

Pseudomembranous colitis (potentially fatal inflammation of colon)

Serum sickness and hepatitis

Rupture of shoulder, hand, or ankle tendons

Severe dermatologic conditions (potentially fatal)

Pilocarpine, other parasympathomimetics

Alteration of heart rhythm (potentially fatal)

Alteration of blood pressure

Gastrointestinal spasm

Diarrhea

Mental confusion

Respiratory distress

Prednisolone, dexamethasone, other glucocorticoids

Decreased resistance to infection

Difficulty in controlling diabetes

Osteoporosis (thinning of bones)

Suppression of adrenal glands (potentially fatal)

Timolol, other beta blockers

Fatigue

Shortness of breath

Slowing of heart rate (potentially fatal)

Exacerbation of obstructive lung disease

Decreased libido

Dizziness

Mental depression

These drugs have been confined to prescription-only status in the United States for good reasons. They should be prescribed by allopathic or osteopathic medical doctors who are the only practitioners that have the training and experience to recognize and treat general medical diseases.

Conclusion

It is imperative for the safety and welfare of patients and the general public that this legislation not be passed into law. Patients who need oral medications for eye conditions should be seen by a physician who has the education, training and experience to handle the condition. ORAL MEDICATIONS ARE VERY DIFFERENT THAN DROPS OR CREAMS – THEY AFFECT THE ENTIRE SYSTEM and should only be prescribed by a physician.