

General Optical Council Press Release – 28 September 2005

For immediate release

General Optical Council prosecutes eBay for illegal contact lens sales

The General Optical Council is bringing charges against eBay for ‘aiding and abetting’ sales of contact lenses without the involvement of a qualified optician.

There are currently over 200 contact lens sales advertised on eBay.co.uk, ranging from prescription daily disposables to 360 day colour lenses.

Contact lenses must be sold by, or under the supervision of, either a registered optician or doctor. Under legislation introduced earlier this year, this now includes ‘zero powered’ or cosmetic lenses.¹

Consumers buying lenses online without a prescription risk serious eye health problems, according to Nathan Efron, GOC member and professor of optometry at Manchester University: “Lenses sit directly on the eye, so even if they feel fine to the wearer, there is a risk of irritation and infection. These kind of problems could result in a wearer becoming intolerant, and not being able to wear contacts again. However, in a worst case scenario, it could lead to vision loss and blindness. So it is incredibly important to have lenses fitted by a qualified professional.”

The Council will argue that eBay is responsible for preventing unsupervised sales of contact lenses via its website. GOC registrar Peter Coe said: “They have the means to stop these items being listed. Members of the public are being put at risk because eBay are just not willing to act on this.”

eBay were made aware of the issue as early as November 2004. Given the company’s continued failure to deal with the problem, a summons was issued in August this year. Peter Coe said: “We very much regret that it has been necessary to take legal action in this case. The GOC will always try to resolve such issues out of court wherever possible.”

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Notes to editors:

¹ The rules governing optical practice and the operation of the GOC are laid out in the Opticians Act 1989. An amendment to the Act was passed on 30 June 2005, which included new requirements relating to the sale and supply of contact lenses. These are laid out in Section 27 of the Act (see http://www.optical.org/index_files/legislation/act_part4.doc).

Date and venue of the hearing

Monday 10 October 2005 at 10.30 am
The Justice Rooms
1 Queen Victoria Street
London
EC4N 4XY

About the GOC

The General Optical Council is the regulatory body for opticians in the UK. Its aims are to protect the public and to ensure high standards of professional conduct and education amongst opticians. All optometrists (ophthalmic opticians), and all dispensing opticians who fit contact lenses or who work with children or low vision patients, must be registered with the GOC to work in the UK. There are around 17,000 optometrists and dispensing opticians currently registered with the GOC.