



Case Studies

Sight tests by optical stores that missed diseases, disorders or resulted in wrong prescription

Hubert Lobo, 45, Surrey

Health risk: Glaucoma missed by automated sight-test at optical store

Hubert Lobo, 45, truly believes his eyesight is precious. "Your eyes are your most important organ. Losing your vision is something that can totally destroy you," says Lobo, a resident of Surrey. That realization came after he lost some peripheral vision – and came very close to losing his sight entirely.

For four consecutive years, Lobo went to an optical store to have an automated sight test by an optician. But in October 2003, after experiencing some starry vision and "power changes" in his eyes, he decided to see Delta optometrist, Dr. Graham Foster, for a comprehensive eye exam. Dr. Foster diagnosed Lobo with glaucoma, and immediately referred him to an ophthalmologist for ongoing treatment to control the condition and prevent any further vision loss.

"I never realized how important it is to have the right people on the job. Opticians lead you in the wrong direction," says Lobo. He believes if he had gone to an optometrist instead of an optician, he would have been treated immediately and would not have experienced vision loss. "I lost four years."

Kelly Matsen, 27, Vernon

Health Risk: missed retinal problem

Kelly Matsen, a 27-year-old teacher in training in Vernon had two sight tests with automated sight testing machines at an optical store in October 2003. She was experiencing a decrease in vision and eye pain and was told by the optician to return in two weeks for an explanation. Matsen did not want to wait as she was experiencing difficulty reading and, as such, studying. She visited optometrist Dr. Giovanni Cinel in Kamloops a couple weeks later to have a comprehensive eye exam. Dr. Cinel identified a problem with her retina. Matsen is now undergoing co-managed treatment with her optometrist and an ophthalmologist.

George Aboussafy, 55, North Vancouver

Health Risk: missed cataract and incorrect prescription

In April 2003, George Aboussafy, from North Vancouver, visited an optician and received a prescription that was more than twice the strength he required. As a result, his glasses caused eyestrain and gave him severe headaches. One year later, Aboussafy visited optometrist Dr. Nermin Karim who conducted a comprehensive eye exam and prescribed the correct prescription lenses. Dr. Karim was also able to identify the initial stages of a cataract and advise Aboussafy on how he could slow the progression of the eye disease.

Male, 24, New Westminster

Health Risk: missed longstanding retinal detachment

In 2002, when he was 22 years old, a New Westminster male had a free sight test by an optician in Squamish and bought glasses. The prescription was fine. The problem was what the sight test didn't catch. The patient had a longstanding retinal detachment that was gradually worsening. When he started to experience "warped vision," he went to his optometrist, Dr. Gordon Moore of New Westminster, for a full eye exam. The optometrist recognized the problem and sent him to an ophthalmologist. The young man was immediately admitted to hospital for surgery to repair his retina.



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Martina Gerrath, 73, Victoria

Health Risk: Incorrect prescription, complicated by glaucoma and cataracts

Martina Gerrath, 73, of Victoria, is a candidate for glaucoma and cataracts, so she visits her ophthalmologist every six months to keep a close watch on the health of her eyes. During one such visit, her ophthalmologist said she needed a new prescription. Unfortunately, shortly after her exam, she broke her frames. She visited the optical store to have them fixed. Because of the poor condition of her frames, an employee there suggested she should get new glasses. Gerrath hadn't brought a prescription with her from her optometrist, Dr. Steve Taylor, but the optical store employee suggested she didn't need to – they could do a sight test and make the glasses. When Gerrath tried the new glasses on, she couldn't see through them. The optical store redid the sight test, producing the same results as before. The glasses were useless. Furthermore, she had to go to great lengths to get her money refunded. More importantly, a woman of her age, and with her eye conditions and history, should never have been considered for a sight test. In fact, the College of Opticians' own standards of practice for the use of auto-refractors/automated systems had been ignored.

Christina Apostol, 20, Vancouver

Health Risk: incorrect prescription

In 2002, when Christina Apostol was 18 years old, she went to an optical store with her friend, also 18, who wanted to have her sight tested. Apostol had no glasses, had no history of any vision problems, but thought she would have the test anyhow since she was there and it was free. Both of the young women were sight-tested. The optician told Apostol she needed glasses and told her friend that her prescription needed to be updated. Apostol felt pressured and decided not to buy glasses, but to seek a second opinion – so both she and her friend paid a visit to an optometrist.

Upon examination, the optometrist found that Apostol did not require glasses. He concluded that in the optician's sight test, she experienced instrument myopia, a tendency for the eyes to focus on the instrument instead of the distance, resulting in a misinterpretation of the sight test results. If she had purchased the glasses, she would have suffered eyestrain and possible progressive nearsightedness, creating a dependency on corrective lenses that could have been avoided. When the optometrist examined her friend, he discovered that she had a minor change in the vision of her left eye, but did not need to change her current spectacles. Furthermore, according to the College of Opticians' own standards of practice for the use of auto-refractors/automated systems, these patients should never have been sight-tested by an optician, because they were under 19 years of age.

Alix Preston, 47, Victoria

Health Risk: missed partial retinal detachment

Alix Preston, a healthy, 47-year-old woman from Victoria, wears glasses but has not been to see an optometrist for three years. On August 14, 2003, Preston broke her glasses and visited a local optician to get them fixed. During her visit, Preston explained that she had been experiencing flashes of light and a blur in her peripheral vision for the past two weeks. The optician conducted the sight test regardless and did not advise Preston to see an optometrist or alert her physician.

Preston continued to experience problems and eventually visited an optometrist on August 19, 2003, where she was diagnosed with partial retinal detachment in her left eye—a severe condition. She was immediately referred to an ophthalmologist, seen the following day and rushed to surgery in Vancouver on August 21, 2003. The ophthalmologist who treated Preston explained that for the tear in her eye to be so advanced, it had to have been there for some time. The condition was missed during her visit with the optician as sight testing cannot detect pathology. Preston was recently informed that the vision loss she has experienced is irreversible.



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Female, 34, Mackenzie

Health Risk: incorrect prescription and missed optic neuritis

A female patient in Mackenzie, B.C. urgently visited an optometrist on July 24, 2003, explaining that she had sunburned her eyes while hiking at high altitude. On July 15, 2003, the patient had contacted a local optometrist to make an appointment and be outfitted with prescription sunglasses prior to her vacation. The optometrist could not see her before her departure date and referred her to an optometrist in Prince George. Not wanting to make the trip, she was advised to go to the emergency room at her local hospital, where she opted not to receive treatment and made an appointment with an optometrist post-vacation. On July 17, 2003, still wanting prescription sunglasses for her trip, the woman visited an optician in Prince George and had a sight test. She had been suffering from extreme photosensitivity, yet was given a sight test by the optician and fitted with prescription sunglasses without any involvement from her optometrist. The woman thought the optician was a doctor, and did not receive the College of Opticians' consent form nor was she provided with clarification around sight testing and eye exams. The optician did not take any patient history before prescribing the sunglasses. When she was finally examined by an optometrist on July 24, 2003, she was immediately referred to an ophthalmologist for treatment of optic neuritis.

Male, 65, Mackenzie

Health Risk: incorrect prescription, missed cataracts and diabetes

A 65-year-old male patient from Mackenzie, B.C., was referred to an optometrist by his physician after experiencing significantly reduced vision in his right eye. In July 1997, the patient had his last complete eye exam by an optometrist and was diagnosed with the early signs of cataracts. His optometrist referred the patient back to his physician for possible diabetes. At the time, the patient tested negative.

In 2002, the patient received a sight test by a local optical store and bought new eyeglasses. The patient had a large bilateral refractive shift in his vision, which should have raised questions about cataracts and/or diabetes. The optician did not detect the refractive shift and prescribed new glasses for the patient. In January 2003, the patient was diagnosed with diabetes. Five months later, he went for another sight test at the same optical store and told the optician that he had been diagnosed with diabetes. Contrary to the guidelines established by the College of Opticians, the patient was sight tested even though he was diabetic and had not received a complete eye examination from his optometrist in six years. The optician could not improve vision in the patient's right eye. In July 2003, the patient visited an optometrist and was diagnosed with cataracts in both eyes and referred to an ophthalmologist for cataract surgery and further assessment. The optometrist has since filed a complaint with the College of Opticians on behalf of the patient.

Seungchul Oh, 48, Prince George

Health Risk: Peripheral retinal detachment and late-stage glaucoma in both eyes

Seungchul Oh, a recent immigrant to Canada from South Korea, was just 42 when he brought his 15-year-old son to Prince George optometrist Robert Reid. Dr. Reid learned that none of the Oh family had ever had a comprehensive eye exam because in Korea an optician had simply performed an automated sight test to provide their glasses. They had never visited an optometrist or a doctor to determine their overall eye health. When Dr. Reid diagnosed the son with peripheral retinal degeneration, the optometrist was concerned that the father might have retinal problems as well, and asked to do an eye exam immediately. Although Oh did not have any complaints about his vision, the examination found not only retinal degeneration, but worse yet, he had later stage glaucoma in both eyes. As a result of the glaucoma, he had lost significant vision in his left eye. Oh was sent to an ophthalmologist for treatment of the glaucoma and is still under the ophthalmologist's care to prevent further vision loss.

Additional case studies are available for throughout B.C.



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