# November 1, 2012

Federal Trade Commission/Office of the Secretary 600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW Room H-113 (Annex X) Washington, DC 20580

Re: Pet Medications Workshop, Project No. P12-1201

To Whom It May Concern:

I am General Counsel of 1-800 CONTACTS, our country's largest direct seller of replacement contact lenses. I thank the Commission for permitting me to participate in its workshop on pet medications held on October 2, 2012, and appreciate having the opportunity to submit these comments.

# Introduction

The marketplace for pet medications looks a lot like the contact lens marketplace before the federal government stepped in to promote competition and consumer choice. We either observed, or participated in these efforts by the federal government, and I would like to take this opportunity to elaborate on three things we learned from our experience:

- 1. When the government requires a consumer have a prescription before purchasing a product, it must also take steps to give consumers the freedom to choose where they purchase the product, and to allow them to benefit from competition;
- 2. Laws, regulations or policies which call on prescribers to issue copies of prescriptions "By Request" of the consumer do not work. They are unenforceable. They are discriminatory. They put consumers in the middle of a conflict of interest. They create an unfair playing field between those doctors who freely release prescriptions and those who do not. They discourage choice, since doctors can ask for a fee or a waiver in exchange for releasing the prescription.
- 3. Giving consumers their prescriptions and the right to choose where they fill them will save consumers money, assure them better service, meet their needs for convenience and promote better health.

# **Background on the Contact Lens Industry**

Twenty years ago, consumers had no right under federal law to copies of their own contact lens prescriptions. Even if consumers could get copies, they were limited in their ability to shop around on those prescriptions as there was evidence contact lens manufacturers and

optometrists were colluding to lock in consumers, and prevent them from purchasing from alternative channels.

Today, contact lens consumers have a right to a copy of their prescriptions automatically — without having to ask, pay, or sign a waiver. They can fill that prescription at the retailer of their choice. When that retailer is someone other than their prescriber, they have a right to have that prescription verified.

# Actions Taken To Bring Competition and Choice to the Contact Lenses Market

How did we get here? There are a number of touchpoints:

1. The Eyeglass Rule. In 1978, the Federal Trade Commission ("FTC") promulgated the Ophthalmic Practice Rules, widely referred to as "the Eyeglass Rule," giving eyeglass wearers the right to automatically receive copies of their prescriptions without having to ask, pay a fee, or sign a waiver. In promulgating this Rule, the FTC found a lack of awareness on the part of consumers that they could choose to purchase their eyeglasses from a retailer other than their prescriber.<sup>2</sup>

Automatic prescription release remains the most cost effective and efficient means of providing consumers with notice that they have a choice to fill the prescription from a retailer other than the prescriber -- a key factor cited by the FTC when it decided, in its systematic review concluded in 2004, to retain the release requirement. As the FTC noted, "[i]n the absence of automatic release...consumers may not know to ask for their prescription."

During the workshop, testimony was received regarding the practice engaged in by many veterinarians of either charging a fee, or requiring the signing of a waiver, in exchange for release of the prescription. The FTC may wish to recall that in promulgating the Eyeglass Rule, it found that "[b]y far the most frequent practice employed to discourage consumers from shopping elsewhere is the charging of a fee for the prescription. . .if the consumer requests his prescription."

The Commission also expressed concern with the practice which "involves the conditioning of the release of a prescription on the signing of a waiver of liability." The use of such a waiver, the FTC found, could "have a significant impact on the consumer's decision whether to take

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> See 16 C.F.R. PART 456—OPHTHALMIC PRACTICE RULE.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Ophthalmic Practice Rules: Request for Comments 62 FR 15865, 15866 (April 3, 1997).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Also, "release of prescriptions enhances consumer choice at minimal compliance cost to eye care practitioners." Ophthalmic Practice Rules, Final Rule, 69 FR 5451, 5453 (February 4, 2004).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Advertising of Ophthalmic Goods and Services, Statement of Basis and Purpose and Final Trade Regulations Rule. 43 FR 23992, 23998 (June 2, 1978).

his prescription elsewhere," and "have the effect of making consumers erroneously believe that other dispensers are not qualified..."

2. Actions by the State Attorneys General. In 1996, Attorneys General from 32 states<sup>6</sup> and a national class of consumers brought an action against the American Optometric Association and the major contact lens manufacturers for conspiring to impede competition from alternative sellers.<sup>7</sup>

The Attorneys General charged that, no longer content to engage in anticompetitive practices alone, eye care professionals and their trade associations coerced manufacturers into colluding with them by threatening to boycott manufacturers who would not agree to bar direct distribution of their lenses to alternative sellers such as online companies, pharmacies and bigbox retailers. The state Attorneys General also had evidence that the defendants' anticompetitive practices caused substantial economic injury to consumers.<sup>8</sup>

The parties eventually settled, with the manufacturers agreeing to abandon their restrictive distribution policies and the American Optometric Association agreeing that it would not make claims that ocular health is impacted by the channel from which consumers purchase their replacement lenses.

3. Testimony by the FTC Staff. In 2002, the FTC staff testified in a regulatory proceeding in Connecticut, and proposed the use of a passive verification system. The FTC also documented how the cost to a consumer in time and travel in picking up lenses from a brick and mortar store could exceed the dollar cost of the lenses themselves.

Specifically, the FTC calculated that an hour long trip to a mass merchandiser had "an implicit time cost of between \$10.96 and \$26.00," which represented "a markup of between 50 and 130 percent over the cost of a multipack." Of note is that the calculation was based on 2001 average wage rates. Presumably, when current wage rates are considered, the premium would be significantly greater. 9

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Advertising of Ophthalmic Goods and Services, Statement of Basis and Purpose and Final Trade Regulations Rule. 43 FR 23992, 23998 (June 2, 1978).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Plaintiff States included: Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Utah, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> In re: Disposable Contact Lens Antitrust Litigation, MDL 1030 (M. D. Fla.).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> See Declaration of Douglas F. Greer on Behalf of the Thirty-One Plaintiff States, In re: Disposable Contact Lens Antitrust Litigation, Case No. MDL 1030 (M.D. Fla.), May 1999 (Att. 58); see also Douglas F. Greer, Ph.D., Supplemental Declaration on Damages in the Contact Lens Case, March 2001 (Att. 59); Nationwide Survey of Contact Lens Wearers, SRI Consulting, Apr. 27, 1999 (Att. 60).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Comments of the Staff of the Federal Trade Commission, Intervenor, In Re: Declaratory proceeding on the Interpretation and Applicability of Various Statutes and Regulations Concerning the Sale of Contact Lenses, State of Connecticut Department of Public Health, Connecticut Board of Examiners for Opticians. (March 27, 2002)

4. The Fairness to Contact Lens Consumers Act. In 2003, Congress enacted the Fairness to Contact Lens Consumers Act (P.L 108-164) ("FCLCA"), guaranteeing consumers the right to automatically receive copies of their prescriptions and the right to have those prescriptions verified when purchasing from retailers other than their prescribers. In 2004, the FTC issued its Final Rule implementing the Act.

We are concerned, however, that despite the clear provisions of the Act and its implementing Final Rule, that many eye care professionals may be ignoring the legal requirement that they automatically release prescriptions to their patients. A survey of optometrists reported upon on January 1, 2008, by the magazine <u>Contact Lens Spectrum</u> found that: "despite [the FCLCA], only half of the respondents replied "yes, to every patient" when asked if they release contact lens prescriptions." <sup>110</sup>

The idea that prescribers may be flaunting the prescription release requirement is not without precedence. In its 2004 review of the Eyeglass Rule, the FTC found that "[t]he evidence in the record, however, suggests that some eye care practitioners continue to refuse to release eyeglass prescriptions, even though this conduct has been unlawful under the Rules for nearly twenty-five years."<sup>11</sup>

We urge the FTC to study whether there is, as suggested by the <u>Contact Lens Spectrum</u> survey, inconsistent compliance with the prescription release requirements of the FCLCA and its implementing Final Rule, and take appropriate action to assure full compliance.

5. End to Restrictive Distribution. In 2005, Congress considered legislation to bar restrictive distribution of prescription contact lenses, and held hearings on the issue. Soon after, the largest manufacturer of restrictive distribution lenses agreed to drop this discriminatory practice, effectively ending it in the industry.

# **Impact on Consumers**

Today, consumers have the right to a copy of their contact lens prescription without having to ask, pay or sign a waiver, and can take that prescription to be filled by any retailer.

What's been the impact on consumers? They are saving money. They are buying more lenses. They have more choices. And they have benefited from technological advances.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Contact Lens Spectrum Magazine, Annual Report, Contact Lenses, 2007. http://www.clspectrum.com/articleviewer.aspx?articleid=101240)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Ophthalmic Practice Rules, Final Rule, 69 FR 5451, 5453 (February 4, 2004).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> H.R. 5762/S. 2480 would have required contact lens manufacturers to make its lenses available on a nondiscriminatory basis to prescribers; entities associated with prescribers; and alternative channels of distribution. An amendment proposed to HR 2744 (the Agriculture Appropriations Bill) by Sen. Robert Bennett (R-UT) would have barred the use of federal funds by the Food and Drug Administration to approve any new lenses unless the manufacturer of those lenses certified that it was distributing its lenses in a non-discriminatory without regard to whether the retailer was a prescriber.

First, they have saved money. In 2004, when the FTC issued its Final Rule implementing the FCLCA, our price at 1-800 CONTACTS for the most popular lenses in America, Acuvue 2 lenses, was \$19.95/box. Today, our price is \$18.99 for our customers who buy a year supply. Those who purchase in lesser quantities pay \$20.99, which is still less than the 2004 price in 2012 constant dollars of \$24.83.

Following is an advertisement run a few weeks ago by one of our competitors, JCP Optical. They are selling these same lenses today for only \$16/box. Also attached is another advertisement where these lenses are being sold for \$12.50, followed by a picture taken this past week at a Wal-Mart parking lot in Pennsylvania in which these lenses are being advertised for \$14.99.



NAME: Brandi Krajewski

09/13/80 Brown **EYES: Brown** 



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Expressions

Focus

Frequency

Freshlook

Proclear

PureVision

Soflens Sofmed

# **Contact Lens Types**

Jaily Disposable

1-2 Week Disposable

1-3 Month Disposable

Conventional (Vial)

Toric

RGP (Oxygen Permeable)

Colored and Tinted

Bifocal

### **Contact Lens** Manufacturers

Bausch & Lomb

Ciba Vision

Cooper Vision

Johnson & Johnson (Vistakon)

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Contact Lens Cases

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Sofmed 1-Day (90 Pack) From \$37.49 / Box





ACUVUE Oasys for Astigmatism From \$38.74 / Box after rebate

ColorBlends From \$40.49 / Box





ACUVUE Advance From \$26.99 / Box

AIR OPTIX NIGHT & DAY AQUA From \$52.48 / Box after rebate

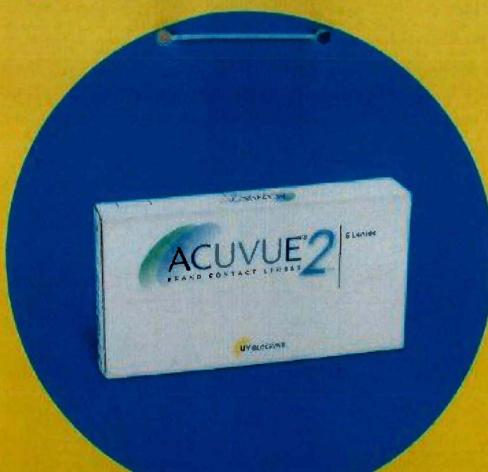




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# low prices on contact lenses



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In 2004, we submitted to the FTC as part of the agency's review of the contact lens market, the following chart listing average prices through the various channels for three kinds of contact lenses; toric (for astigmatism); color; and common spherical lenses.

Contact Lens Price Comparison 2004				
Channel	Focus Toric	FreshLook Colorblends	Acuvue 2	
Mass Merchandisers	\$53.21	\$35.40	\$18.05	
Optical Retail Chains	\$66.69	\$42.09	\$22.85	
Independent Optometrists	\$70.91	\$46.67	\$24.39	
Ophthalmologists	\$73.18	\$46.54	\$25.74	
Average of ECPs	\$67.87	\$44.43	\$23.31	
1-800 CONTACTS	\$59.00	\$34.95	\$19.95	

Source: 1-800 Contacts, Comment #1, at 17-1 8 and Attach. 23 as reprinted in FTC Report "The Strength of Competition in the Sale of Rx Contact Lenses: An FTC Study, February, 2005.

The next chart compares our current prices on these products to what we charged in 2004:

# Contact Lens Pricing at 1-800 CONTACTS

Product	2004 (found in FTC Study)	2004 price in 2012 constant dollars 13	Current Pricing
Acuvue 2 (6pk)	\$19.95	\$24.83	\$18.99/ea.
			for annual supply
			or \$20.99/ea
Focus Toric <sup>14</sup>	\$59.00	\$73.43	\$49.99/ea
			for annual supply
			or \$57.49/ea
FreshLook	\$34.95	\$43.50	\$39.49/ea
Colorblends			for annual supply
(6pk)			or \$46.99/ea

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Based on annual CPI increases for medical care commodities

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Current comparable product is "Air Optix for Astigmatism".

As this comparison illustrates, the vast majority of contact lens wearers (those not wearing specialized color lenses) are spending less today than they did for those lenses in 2004. When inflation is taken into account, even those wearing color lenses are paying less today for an annual supply than they did when the FCLCLA went into effect.

Consumers are buying more contact lenses. In 2003, the largest manufacturer of contact lenses, Johnson & Johnson, had vision care revenues of \$1.271 billion. Since then, revenues have more than doubled – to \$2.9 billion. J & J has seen a 16% increase in just the past two years.

With the market for contact lenses opened up, manufacturers have been forced to compete. Instead of investing in just their relationships with prescribers, they invested in the kinds of things manufacturers do in a competitive market – in advertising, marketing and in product innovation.

Since enactment of the FCLCA, we have seen the development of and popularization of lenses made of silicon hydrogel, and the spread in the use of daily disposable lenses (which promote ocular health since they are replaced daily).

Back in 2003, as indicated in our product brochure, we sold 37 different brands and types of disposable lenses. Today, 1-800 CONTACTS sells 91 different brands and types of disposable lenses.

And innovation continues. Following is an advertisement placed in the September issue of <u>Contact Lens Spectrum</u> by Bausch and Lomb promoting its new technology for daily wear lenses.

First there was Hydrogel

Then Silicone Hydrogel

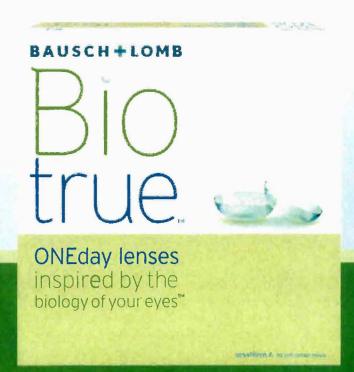
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# Impact on Optometry

When the Fairness to Contact Lens Consumers Act was considered by Congress, claims were made by some opponents that creating competition in the sale of replacement contact lenses would (1) result in transfer pricing, with exam prices increasing to compensate for lost product sales, and (2) harm optometry as an industry.

In calendar year 2008, the median exam fee for new spherical contact lens patients was \$181. In 2009, the median fee had increased to \$198. But the median exam fee then fell to \$185 in 2010, where it remained for calendar year 2011-- representing an increase of only \$4 per exam since 2008. <sup>15</sup>

For exams given to non-contact lens wearers, the median fee in 2008 was \$107. In 2009, the median fee increased to \$115, where it has remained each year since. Consumers who shop around can find even more competitive prices. Following are advertisements offering such exams for \$39 in one case, and in another for \$69.95 bundled with two pairs of eyeglasses. <sup>16</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Key Metrics of Optometric Practice, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 editions.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> <u>Id.</u>; also, advertisements for America's Best Contacts & Eyeglasses and Hour Eyes Doctors of Optometry.

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In terms of the health of the eye care business, <u>Contact Lens Spectrum</u> reported in January 2008, that the "ophthalmic sector as a whole" grew "250 percent" over the previous five years, which, it noted was "far ahead of the S&P 500", and concluding that the contact lens industry had been "graced with growth and product innovation".<sup>17</sup> The same publication reported in its annual report for 2009 (during the depths of the recession), that as of "September 2009, the ophthalmic sector as a whole was up 44 percent year-to-date...far ahead of the S&P 500."<sup>18</sup>

The next year, the publication proclaimed in its annual report for 2010 that "[m]arket and survey data show that the industry remained largely unaffected in 2010 by the state of the economy" reporting that while "the economy ha[d] been challenging for many [in optometry]. . . . the market again appear[ed] to be weathering the storm," and that "the ophthalmic sector as a whole remained strong." 19

The report found "[t]here was a marked slowdown in the ophthalmic market starting in the fourth quarter of 2008, with improvement through 2009 and into 2010," concluding that "[t]he contact lens industry remains healthy" A year later, in its annual report for 2011, the publication reported that despite the slow growth in the general economy "the contact lens market remained healthy in 2011, with U.S. sales growing 5 percent through the third quarter."

## Conclusion

Years of focus and dogged effort on the part of governmental players – the Federal Trade Commission, the Congress, and the state Attorneys General – has succeeded in injecting competition and choice into the market for replacement contact lenses, transforming the market to the benefit of all involved – consumers, eye care professionals, retailers and manufacturers.

There is no reason to believe that the market for pet medications will respond any differently. I am hopeful that the FTC's workshop, and the solicitation of public comments, marks the beginning of a similar process, and not the end, so that all Americans who own pets – and that is most of us – can get a chance to benefit as have contact lens consumers.

Sincerely,

R. Joe Zeidner General Counsel 1-800 CONTACTS

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Annual Report 2007, Contact Lens Spectrum, January 2008.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Annual Report 2009, Contact Lens Spectrum, January 2010.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Annual Report 2010, Contact Lens Spectrum, January 2011.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Annual Report 2010, <u>Contact Lens Spectrum</u>, January 2009. Also, Annual Report 2011, <u>Contact Lens Spectrum</u>, January 2012.