

As a dedicated practitioner to the profession of optometry and the overall health of my patients, my wholehearted belief is that contact lenses have become viewed as a retail item and not as a medical device by the general public. The fault of this lies with the flawed systems of online purchasing and the marketing of these devices to the masses. A contact lens prescription is specific to that patient based on their needs, which are assessed by an eye doctor. The way patients are allowed to purchase their contact lenses is abused. A patient can simply select any parameter they want online, which is supposed to be confirmed by a doctor. Many times, the lenses have already shipped out to a patient before a doctor can confirm.

I would love to assume patients know their prescription. Mostly, they do not. And other times they may choose a less expensive option without knowing anything about a lens. Every year I tell my patients my goal is to insure their eyes are healthy inside and out; a part of that is a corneal assessment to pick the brand of contact lenses that will make sure their eyes remain healthy. No one else can decide this besides an eye doctor. No one else is extensively trained in material, curvature and prescription. No one else continues education to keep up with the latest medical advancements to give patients what they need.

The other part is to assess their vision and internal health. If a patient feels their vision is unchanged, that does not mean there may not be an underlying ocular disease that shows no symptoms. I myself would never know if I was developing glaucoma or had a peripheral retinal tear without having my eyes checked regularly. This includes a retinal examination, which I strongly recommend every year. I have been in practice for a little over 2 years. In these short 2 years, I cannot count the amount of times I have found underlying corneal or retinal disease in young, healthy patients with no visual symptoms. Many times, these patients needed additional follow up and care.

If we begin to allow companies with strictly financial interests to give patients an opportunity to miss an eye exam without a doctor's advisement, we are working against everything modern medicine has to offer. This means allowing contact lens prescriptions to have extended expiration dates. Or extending spectacle prescriptions for longer than 1-2 years. Or allowing online vision exams. This will discredit the importance of annual eye exams, which healthcare professionals have worked so hard to make sure it is a known priority.

Directly from the CDC.gov website:

"It [diabetes mellitus] is the leading cause of blindness among U.S. working-aged adults aged 20–74 years. An estimated 4.1 million and 899,000 Americans are affected by retinopathy and vision-threatening retinopathy, respectively."

On glaucoma: "Open angle, is a chronic condition that progress slowly over long period of time without the person noticing vision loss until the disease is very advanced, that is why it is called 'sneak thief of sight.' "

On cataracts: "...is the leading cause of blindness worldwide, and the leading cause of vision loss in the United States. Cataracts can occur at any age because of a variety of causes, and can be present at birth. Although treatment for the removal of cataract is widely available, access barriers such as insurance coverage, treatment costs, patient choice, or lack of awareness prevent many people from receiving the proper treatment."

On Age Related Macular Degeneration: "The number of people with AMD is estimated to reach 2.95 million in 2020. AMD is the leading cause of permanent impairment of reading and fine or close-up vision among people aged 65 years and older." *

NONE of these conditions can be identified, diagnosed or treated without regular eye examinations. To encourage extended prescriptions without expirations or extended expirations eliminates the opportunity for these patients to be properly managed early. Access to healthcare is something we are proud of in the United States. Why encourage delayed access to care?

*http://www.cdc.gov/visionhealth/basic_information/eye_disorders.htm