



HEALTH CARE ALLIANCE FOR PATIENT SAFETY

May 28, 2020

The Honorable Brian Kemp
Office of the Governor
206 Washington Street
111 State Capitol
Atlanta, GA 30334

Dear Governor Kemp,

The Health Care Alliance for Patient Safety (APS) is comprised of health care providers, medical device manufacturers, and vision insurers that support the need for heightened awareness regarding pressing threats to patients' eye health and safety. Our mission is to build public and government awareness of patient safety issues and advocate for the enforcement of laws designed to safeguard public health. As the COVID-19 crisis has caused dramatic shifts in all aspects of everyday life, APS has continued to promote patients' ability to access their eye care professionals and their prescribed medical devices in a safe and reliable way.

We believe the doctor-patient relationship is key to preventing adverse patient events, whether through in-person interaction or telehealth services. With faster and clearer methods to connect through telehealth, more patients can immediately engage with their doctors and collaborate to improve overall health, even during this time of social distancing. These benefits do bring potential challenges. While patients need ready access to care, telehealth tools should uphold and support the doctor-patient relationship and the medically-recognized standard of care that preserves patient health. Unfortunately, the use of some ocular online tools and vision test apps can give patients a false sense of security that may lead them to delay essential, sight-saving treatment of more complex diseases.

The existing laws in Georgia safeguard patients and ensure that a high standard of care remains at the center of telehealth services. The claim that there is a need to dismiss these patient safety laws because doctors are "impossible to visit without violating social distancing recommendations"¹ is false, and dismisses the essential care eye doctors including optometrists in Georgia – and across the nation – have provided during the crisis whether in person, online, or over the phone working directly with their patients to ensure that they continue to have access to their prescribed medical devices, including contact lenses and glasses.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many eye care providers have proactively contacted their patients to ensure that their prescriptions are filled as needed and have offered prescription expiration extensions on a case-by-case basis, depending on what is safe for the patient. Practices have fully adjusted their processes in order to ensure that their patients are taken care of and have access to the medical devices they were prescribed. Indeed, while some eye care providers have opted to use technological means to

¹ <https://www.georgiapolicy.org/2020/05/foundation-joins-plea-for-georgia-to-allow-online-vision-care/>

fulfill certain patient care needs on a temporary basis during this crisis, these uses of technology have been conducted in accordance with the current standard of care and with full respect to the doctor-patient relationship, the essential foundation of safe and effective health care decision making.

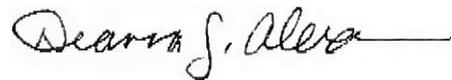
Online vision tests, sometimes referenced as “ocular telehealth services,” are often offered by online retailers as a means to provide patients with a rapid method of obtaining contact lenses or eye glasses, but there are several downfalls to these services. First, many online vision tests result in the patient being offered a brand of contact lenses that were never evaluated on the patient’s eyes by their eye doctor, which can lead to adverse events.² Second, these online refractions are not a replacement for comprehensive, in-person eye examinations but can be confused with comprehensive eye care. Over 250 systemic diseases can be detected through a comprehensive eye exam, and even if a patient has 20/20 vision, this does not mean their eyes and body are perfectly healthy.³ APS believes that telehealth services need to prioritize the doctor-patient relationship, patient health and safety, and should be considered a tool to complement an existing doctor-patient relationship.⁴

Furthermore, Georgia’s phased reopening has removed any obvious need to abolish existing patient safety laws or shift to online eye care. Softening patient safeguards now is not necessary and we believe that eliminating these safety regulations would allow for medical devices to be dispensed in a way that threatens patient safety and the current standard of care.

While we fully support the responsible use of telehealth,⁵ we believe that removing laws that act as safeguards to patient health during this time would be harmful. Telehealth, including online vision tests, should continue to be used as a tool to strengthen the doctor-patient relationship and ultimately prioritize health and safety – not put patients’ eye and overall health at risk.

We urge you to keep patient safeguards in place, protect the doctor-patient relationship, and protect patient safety.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Deanna J. Alexander" followed by a horizontal line.

Dr. Deanna Alexander, O.D.
Chair, Health Care Alliance for Patient Safety

² https://www.ftc.gov/system/files/documents/public_events/1285493/panel_ii_contact_lens_health_and_safety_issues.pdf

³ <https://www.aoa.org/assets/documents/EBO/Systemic-Conditions-Ocular-Visual-Manifestations.pdf>

⁴ https://www.patientsafetytoday.com/telehealth_principles

⁵ https://www.patientsafetytoday.com/telehealth_principles