



June 12, 2012

Dear CARP Members,

With recent fee cuts announced by the government of Ontario, the challenge of providing access to high quality care to all those in need of treatment is about to go from daunting to insurmountable.

Ontario's 452 eye physicians and surgeons (EPSO.ca) have been double timing it for years, trying to keep up with ever increasing demand to provide the best treatments to our patients. Today, we can detect and treat all the most common blinding conditions like never before, and we can provide this treatment to everyone requiring it.

For example, we now have specialized testing to allow us to safely administer injections that halt and even reverse blindness caused by macular degeneration and diabetes. Glaucoma, a degenerative disease that silently robs one of their peripheral and then central vision, can be detected early using a combination of physician expertise and new high tech testing.

But the technology required to catch and treat these blinding conditions comes at a price. Much like the newest home computers, the initial cost for equipment is very high and depreciation follows quickly behind - in the order of 3-4 years. The availability of the specialized testing required to detect the onset of eye disease and monitor treatments is now in jeopardy due to the government's recent fee cuts: the cost to provide these tests exceeds the reimbursement for doing so.

For the time being, our dedication to our patients mandates us to continue to provide the best care that we can. We are performing these procedures at a financial loss. Over the next few years, however, as equipment fails, we will not be able to replace it. Wait times for testing will grow at an alarming rate.

The math is astounding. Ontario's population grows by 80,000 more seniors each year, and will constitute more than 25% of our population by 2030. Each year we graduate an average of 20 new ophthalmologists; 45 retire. Since 1992 there has been an increase of less than 50 ophthalmologists in Ontario, yet the number of examinations and surgeries we perform on patients has more than doubled.

The government's cuts do two things that negatively impact patient care: they reduce access to important tests and procedures, and, by restricting the quality of care we can provide to patients, they drive ophthalmologists out of the province, exacerbating the shortage already developing due to demographics.

We want to work with the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care to help it meet Ontario's current fiscal challenges without impacting patient care. Let's not go back in time and allow people to go blind from treatable diseases. Our seniors deserve better than that.

Sincerely,

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Chair, Eye Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario