

## **Board of Registration of Optometry**

### **Public Session Minutes**

Meeting Held by Phone/Video Conference

DATE: June 17, 2020 TIME: 10:00am

#### **Board Members Present by Phone/Video:**

Everett Sabree, OD

Rhonda Willinger, OD

Marianne Sarkis, Ph.D.

Jeanette Sewell, OD

#### **DPL Staff Present by Phone/Video:**

Michael Hawley, Executive Director

Sheila York, Board Counsel

#### **Board members absent:**

Bruce Rakusin, OD

#### **Members of the Public Present by Phone/Video:**

Gary Chu, OD

Wayne Zahka, OD

Mark Molloy

Charlene Ridout

Meeting called to order at 10:09 AM by Dr. Sabree

#### **Review of minutes:**

- May 20, 2020

**Dr. Sewell moved to approve the minutes of the May 20, 2020 meeting as written. Dr. Willinger seconded. The motion passed on a roll call vote: Dr. Sewell – “yes”; Dr. Willinger – “yes”; Dr. Sarkis – “yes”; Dr. Sabree – “yes”.**

#### **Report from Executive Director:**

- Mr. Hawley reported that the Massachusetts test centers used for the Board’s jurisprudence exam have begun to reopen. Several applicants have been able to take the exam. To date, no conditional licensure agreements have been required. Mr. Hawley also reported that the ARBO annual meeting will be held on Saturday 6/20/2020 via teleconference.

#### **Report from Board Counsel:**

- Attorney York reported that there are no updates regarding glaucoma legislation and the healthcare reform bill. She will continue to work on regulation changes.

## **Discussion:**

- Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic:
- The Board held a brief discussion about the reopening of offices in light of the phased reopening as well as various sources of guidance on reopening. Optometrists are back to seeing regular patients in the office. However there is still a need for telepractice, especially for patients who are at high risk.

Dr. Gary Chu, Vice President of Professional Affairs at New England College of Optometry, addressed the board to discuss this need. He mentioned issues related to on-line refractions and the need for detailed medical history. Dr. Wayne Zahka, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Society of Optometrists, also addressed the need for telehealth and concerns that patients are having difficulty getting insurers to reimburse for telehealth visits. He was concerned that insurance agencies and the government may be seeing optometrists as “refractionists” and not as providers of medical services. Dr. Chu commented that optometrists are fully capable of providing medical care and mentioned a survey conducted in Florida regarding standards of care. Both Dr. Chu and Dr. Zahka felt that there was a need for the Board to create a policy regarding the provision of telehealth by optometrists.

The Board discussed a policy, similar to what the Podiatry Board recently issued, which would state as follows: “the practice of optometry shall not require a face-to-face encounter between the optometrist and the patient prior to health care delivery via telehealth. The standard of care applicable to the optometrist is the same whether the patient is seen in-person or through telehealth. An optometrist providing telehealth services shall comply with all applicable federal and state statutes and regulations, including but not limited to those governing medication management and prescribing services.

The Board discussed the need for such a policy and whether it should be created as an interim policy or as a permanent policy. The Board agreed that, given the current trends in practice, that a permanent policy would be more appropriate. Modifications to the policy can be made, if the need arises. The Board agreed to adopt a telehealth policy today and review it at future meetings.

**Dr. Sewell moved to adopt the telehealth policy quoted above Dr. Willinger seconded. The motion passed on a roll call vote: Dr. Sewell – “yes”; Dr. Willinger – “yes”; Dr. Sarkis – “yes”; Dr. Sabree – “yes”.**

## **Open Session for topics not reasonably anticipated by the chair within 48 hours of the meeting:**

**At 11:00 am, Dr. Sewell moved to adjourn the public meeting. Dr. Willinger seconded. The motion passed on a roll call vote: Dr. Sewell – “yes”; Dr. Willinger – “yes”; Dr. Sarkis – “yes”; Dr. Sabree – “yes”.**

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Michael Hawley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

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Michael Hawley, Executive Director

Documents used in the open meeting:

- Agenda for June 17, 2019 board meeting
- Minutes of May 20, 2019 board meeting
- ARBO 2020 Virtual Meeting Agenda