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FORUM LETTER TO STRAITS TIMES

Case clarifies consumer advice

I refer to the Buyer Beware column (ST, Sept 29) in which one of Case's consumer tips is: 'An optician/optometrist is qualified to dispense optical aids but not provide medical advice. Consumers should consult an ophthalmologist to manage their eye conditions.' The Consumers Association of Singapore (Case) has since received some public queries about the distinction between opticians and optometrists.

While there are differences in the professions of optician and optometrist, there is no official distinction at present. A check with the Ministry of Health confirms that it has not finalised its regulatory distinction between opticians and optometrists.

According to the ministry's public consultation paper for the proposed regulatory framework for optometrists and opticians in Singapore that was issued in September last year, 'in general, optometrists are primary care practitioners performing refraction, eye screening and basic eye care while opticians dispense optical aids'.

The statutory regulatory framework for opticians and optometrists is under way and will be announced in the future. According to information from the ministry website (<http://www.moh.gov.sg/corp/eservices/econsultation/details.do?id=433>), the ministry hopes to implement the new regulatory framework by next July.

Until the regulatory distinction is made, Case believes consumers should be prudent. For serious eye conditions possibly requiring medical treatment or surgical management, they should still consult an ophthalmologist or a professional medical practitioner.

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