

BY EMAIL

To: All NI General Ophthalmic Service Contractors

27 July 2020

Dear Colleague

Move to Phase 2 of Ophthalmic Services Re-building Plan

I am writing to notify you that, further to my letter of 17 June 2020 on the strategic plan for primary care ophthalmic services during Covid-19, I am now able to provide you with a firm date for the commencement of Phase 2 of the re-establishment of ophthalmic services. This will take place on **Monday, 3rd August 2020**.

Phase 2 includes the main elements of routine eye care, including eye examinations and ophthalmic dispensing and the provision of Enhanced Services. In addition, although it is anticipated that priority continues to be offered to HSC patients in greatest need, from 3rd August it will be possible to issue **recall reminders** to patients who may be due for a routine eye examination. This further easement is possible in the context of current evidence that, although Covid-19 is still present in UK and locally, the number of cases and transmission is low at this point.

The easement also reflects anecdotal evidence from contractors and providers that the standard operating procedures, modifications, and operational protocols which you have put in place to ensure that services are delivered as safely as possible, and in line with national guidance, have allowed and facilitated this phased approach to rebuilding. Confidence is growing around these new ways of working.

Following recent guidance from PHA in relation to “Reducing Workforce Movement between Care Homes: Guidance For Agency Workers and Visiting Professionals” Phase 2 does not include domiciliary eyecare provision due to the higher level of COVID–19 risk. Although this will be disappointing, it is anticipated that a further review of domiciliary eyecare provision will be possible in the coming weeks, with the likelihood that symptom-led eye examinations in patients’ own homes will be first to be eased. At that point it is anticipated that any professional planning on visiting a care home or supported living setting will consider the risk, give consideration to the reduction of foot fall, and adhere to the guiding principles published and the homes own risk assessment in relation to visiting.

The move to Phase 2 on 3 August is consistent with the five guiding principles set out in the Northern Ireland Executive document *Coronavirus: Executive Approach to*

Decision-Making. In addition, the approach aligns with College of Optometrists' guidance on service provision during the Covid-19 Amber period.

It is important to note that the SARS-CoV2 virus still poses a significant public health threat to the Northern Ireland population. It is therefore essential that optometrists closely follow the operational guidance issued on 17th June. That guidance sets out how practices should prepare for the re-establishment of primary eyecare and General Ophthalmic Services through the various phases.

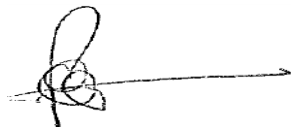
http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/pdf/PrimaryCare_OPHServices_OperationalGuidance_170620.pdf

In addition, HSCB continue to work with DoH to consider the scope to source appropriate PPE to facilitate service provision.

I will write to you in the coming weeks to provide you with a firm date for the transition to Phase 3, including domiciliary eyecare provision.

Once again I would like to thank you for your patience and professionalism during this phased rebuilding of primary eyecare. HSC Board, myself and my team in Ophthalmic Services and wish you and your staff well.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized initial 'R' followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.

Raymond Curran
Head of Ophthalmic Services

Cc Paul Montgomery, DoH
Michael O'Neill, DoH
James Murphy, DoH
William Stockdale, Optometry NI
Sloan Harper, HSCB