

General Ophthalmic Services Memorandum

18 June 2012

**To all Optometrists,
Ophthalmic Medical Practitioners
and Dispensing Opticians**

providing General Ophthalmic Services

Dear Practitioner

**Re: UPDATED GUIDANCE ON THE RETENTION OF PATIENT RECORDS IN
OPHTHALMIC PRACTICE**

The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) is issuing this updated information for guidance purposes only. **Before destroying any patient record optometrists should satisfy themselves that they will have no further need for that record. Please be aware that your only defence against any challenges or claims, are your patient records.** Disposal of any record must be done securely in order to preserve the confidentiality of the patient.

This guidance takes into account: the current GOS Terms of Service, the Data Protection Act 1998, current recommendations from the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise, optical professional bodies and advice from the Department of Health ('Health Record Retention Schedule' Annex D1, 2009).

The DHSSPS retention schedule details a **Minimum Retention Period** for each type of health record. Records (whatever the media/format) may be retained for longer than the minimum period. However, records should not ordinarily be retained for more than 30 years. Practitioners should remember that records containing personal information are subject to the Data Protection Act 1998, which says that information should be kept for no longer than is necessary.



The Health and Social Care Board advise:

- Records should in general be retained for a period of 12 years following the patient's last visit.
- With special regard to children, retain until the patient's 25th birthday or 26th if young person was 17 at conclusion of treatment, (The age of majority in Northern Ireland is 18 years and best advice would be to retain these records for a further 12 years i.e. until a patient reaches the age of 30 years.
- Where a patient has died their records should be kept for a period of 10 years after death.
- For patients involved in clinical trials please manage any records in relation to this as per the trial protocol. Usually these types of records should be retained for a longer period of time.
- Records retained longer than the minimum period should be reviewed periodically to ensure that there is a continued need to retain them.

The decision to destroy a record should be made by an optometric practitioner. Destruction should always take place under confidential conditions – e.g. on-site shredding and record/log made of date of destruction.

Ownership of patient records

The guiding principle is that patient records remain the property of the practice in which they are generated. If a practice closes down, arrangements should be made wherever possible for the transfer of the patients' records to another registered practitioner or optometric practice, informing the patients that this has been done. Where 'GOS' records (that is records of patients who have received or are currently in receipt of GOS) are being transferred then the contractor who originally owned the records must advise HSCB of their intentions in regard to future ownership of these GOS records. If it is not possible for GOS records to be transferred to another practice, rather than their being destroyed, records should be offered to the HSCB or a person nominated by the HSCB so that retention of the records can be arranged.



Any queries relating to this MOS should be directed in the first instance to:

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