

## OPHTHALMIC SERVICES

COVID-19 UPDATE: No: 1

27 March 2020

Dear Contractor

In the past few days it has been clarified that primary care optometry services have designated as an [essential service](#)<sup>1</sup> for the provision of urgent services and as such are therefore not subject to enforced closure during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the nature and scope of essential and urgent service provision has been clarified and has received the support of the [General Optical Council](#)<sup>2</sup>.

Contractors will have received the letter, on 25 March 2020 via HSC Board, from Department of Health (DoH) outlining the plan for financial sustainability of primary care ophthalmic services during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the incoming days the HSCB will provide additional guidance for Contractors in relation to the implementation of this plan. Please ensure that you read the letter in detail.



The aim of this first, and subsequent regular update bulletins, are to provide Optometry Contractors with information and guidance to:

1. Support the implementation of the DoH plan for financial sustainability
2. Support contractors in implementing their arrangements for the provision of essential and urgent eyecare
3. Support contractors with queries that they may have

This is a very worrying and difficult time for you all, please be assured that Ophthalmic Services staff within HSCB are making every effort to help you at this time.

Thank you

Ophthalmic Services

Health and Social Care Board

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\*\*\*\* FOR YOU – PLEASE NOTE \*\*\*\*

- **COVID -19 guidance:** Please ensure you keep up to date with the current COVID -19 information for NI Optometry Contractors at the following links:  
<http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/3120.htm>  
<http://primarycare.hscni.net/> (accessed from the HSC Optometry Portal only)
- **Financial support:** In the incoming days HSCB intend to issue guidance to help you in implementing the plan for financial sustainability for ophthalmic services, specifically advice on the conditions of the financial plan and how these conditions are reflected in the services you provide and what you need to do in the short and medium term in consideration of these conditions.

For example:

1. ***“Additional support payments being made each month to cover the shortfall in GOS payment in 2020-21 compared with the same month in 2019-20” .....“Further details will shortly be available in respect of the process for applying for the additional support payments and in due course, in relation to support payment recovery.”***
  - Contractors will be advised of the arrangements for the recording of services which are provided, to inform what shortfall exists as it is appreciated that normal and routine services are not currently being provided. Also, information on the process for the payments will be provided as soon as is possible.
2. ***“Assist the wider NHS, when asked by the HSCB, wherever possible and practical”.***
  - The implications of this are not currently known but you will be kept informed when any details of this requirement is clear. This may include helping primary care colleagues, such as Pharmacy or general practice, being redeployed to a central eyecare hub or, if IP-qualified, being asked to accept and manage appropriately-triaged patients from eye casualty or secondary care review clinics.
3. ***“At a minimum, each practice would be expected to provide a telephone/email advice service as well as a drop-off or postal service for repairs”.***
  - The arrangements to allow practices to ***formally confirm*** this is being provided will be provided as soon as is possible.  
It is planned that this information will be captured in a short ‘confirmation of status’ survey which Ophthalmic Services in HSCB will issue in the incoming days.

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4. ***“If a practice is no longer able to provide any form of service, it should make arrangements to redirect those requiring urgent care to a neighbouring practice”***
- As above it is planned that this information will be captured in a short ‘confirmation of status’ survey which Ophthalmic Services in HSCB will issue in the incoming days. Additionally HSCB are working to determine the implications of this for Contractors who advise they are in this position.

**\*\*\*\* FOR YOUR PATIENTS – PLEASE NOTE \*\*\*\***

- **Referrals to Eye Casualty (patients with emergency / sight threatening problems) – reminder of contact details**
  - BHSCT Eye Casualty: RVH tel: 028 9615 5872 **or** RVH main switchboard 028 9024 0503 ask for Eye Casualty.
  - WHSCT Eye Casualty: Altnagelvin Hospital tel: 028 7134 5171 ask for ophthalmologist on call.

Referral Pathway Guidance is hosted at the following link, or [click here](#)

[http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/pdf/Eye%20Referral%20Pathways\\_N%20Ireland\\_Updated%20April%202019.pdf](http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/pdf/Eye%20Referral%20Pathways_N%20Ireland_Updated%20April%202019.pdf)

Please, as usual, telephone Eye Casualty for advice for any patient with acute ocular symptoms who requires urgent ophthalmological assessment, including those patients with symptoms of COVID -19. **DO NOT SEND PATIENTS TO THE HOSPITAL WITHOUT TELEPHONING FIRST.**

- **Urgent Referrals to the Glaucoma Service (Belfast HSCT)**
  - Patients with suspect angle-closure glaucoma or, IOP greater than or equal to 38mmHg, should not during the time of COVID-19 pandemic be referred to Eye Casualty. These patients should be referred to the Glaucoma Service in the Shankill Glaucoma Clinic by telephoning to arrange for the patient to be seen. Telephone number: 028 9504 0042

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- **Urgent Referrals to the Macular Service (*rapid access pathway for suspect wAMD/RVO/DMO*)**

- Where a practice is CCG enabled the referral **must** be sent electronically via CCG using the designated Ophthalmology-Macular destination
- Where possible and available, please upload an OCT scan with the referral. This will aid the Hospital Eye Service in triage.

- **Referrals to the Eye Care Liaison Service (ECLO)**

Please note that referrals to the ECLO service should be sent via email to the following email address. Where a practice is using the FPS Optometry portal and has been issued their HSCNI email address this is the email account from which ECLO service referrals should be sent.

- ECLO referral form is hosted at the following link or, [click here](#)  
[http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/pdf/Optometry\\_ECLO\\_Referral\\_Form\\_June\\_2016.pdf](http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/pdf/Optometry_ECLO_Referral_Form_June_2016.pdf)
- ECLO referral email address: [ECLONI.Mailbox@rnib.org.uk](mailto:ECLONI.Mailbox@rnib.org.uk)

- **Urgent and Essential Eyecare Services in Primary Care Optometry Practices**

- It is accepted that these are unusual circumstances currently, particularly in the context of clinical care provision. [The College of Optometrists](#) have provided some useful tools for practitioners including templates which can be used to support the provision of urgent eyecare by telephone and remote consultation. All practitioners are encouraged to avail of these resources. Please also refer to the **GOC/Joint Regulator** guidance for remote consultations and prescribing (at the following link or, [click here](#)  
[https://www.optical.org/filemanager/root/site\\_assets/publications/covid\\_19/High-level-principles-for-remote-prescribing\\_.pdf](https://www.optical.org/filemanager/root/site_assets/publications/covid_19/High-level-principles-for-remote-prescribing_.pdf)

As advised earlier in this bulletin, further guidance will be provided by HSCB in the incoming days in relation to the requirements to maintain a record service activity for the purposes of determination of 'shortfall'.

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- **Safeguarding:** Where staff cover in a practice has been reduced during the time of COVID-19 pandemic, Optometrists are reminded of the need to consider at all times guidance in relation to safeguarding particularly for seeing children and vulnerable adults.
- **NIPLEARS provider list:** Please check the NIPLEARS list of accredited practices at: <http://www.hscboard.hscni.net/eyes/> to ensure that your practice is included and that the details are up to date. **Note:** this list is still being made available to GPs, community pharmacies and the public so that patients may contact a practice by telephone for advice and triage if they have acute eye related symptoms. You may need to contact Contractor practices in your locality to discuss any potential for buddy arrangements should you be unable to provide the care and advice that may be required.
- **Repair/Replacement GOS Claims:** for patients who have broken their spectacles and they are essential i.e. the patient does not have a spare/back-up pair available and would, in normal circumstances have been eligible for a GOS ST and associated voucher at the time of breakage prior approval will still be required. For an OCS user please submit the query using the usual approval function on the OCS system. For non OCS users please submit the claim via [priorapproval.bso@hscni.net](mailto:priorapproval.bso@hscni.net). Please be assured that a timely decision will be made on all such approval requests.
- **Essential and urgent supply/repair of spectacles:** the HSCB has been advised that some of the manufacturing/glazing laboratories are now closed. You are encouraged to contact your representative organisation, Optometry Northern Ireland, if you have access to glazing facilities and are able to assist colleagues in primary care in the provision of supply and repair of spectacles. This would allow support for the profession and allow development of a network of practices for continuity of supply at this time.

\*\*\*\* **Ophthalmic Advice and Support** \*\*\*\*



If you have a query you can receive advice from the following people:

Janice McCrudden: [janice.mccrudden@hscni.net](mailto:janice.mccrudden@hscni.net)

Fiona North: [fiona.north@hscni.net](mailto:fiona.north@hscni.net)

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