

OPHTHALMIC SERVICES

Optometry Bulletin No: 11

01 February 2021

From the beginning of January we have once again felt the immense impact of the pandemic and concern about the immediate future on many fronts. Since the onset of the pandemic we have all worked in a truly collaborative way, despite the significant challenges which have arisen, to plan the best way to provide care to our patients. Thank you all for the efforts you have made and continue to make to maintain access to care for patients. Your support and dedication is sincerely valued.

We should be proud that Optometry is recognised as an essential primary care healthcare service but with that comes responsibilities including continuing to provide services during this current phase of the pandemic. The guidance provided by Health and Social Care Board (HSCB), highlighted within this Bulletin, and wider information from the College and other professional organisations aims to support you as you provide services to your patients during this Amber phase.

Whilst access to the vaccination programme has been welcomed by everyone and gives hope, this does not diminish the concerns and the issues we are all collectively doing our best to address at this time.

Please be assured that your contribution is valued and should you have any concerns do not hesitate to contact any of the Ophthalmic Services Team for support or advice.

Raymond Curran

Head of Ophthalmic Services, Health and Social Care Board

This Bulletin highlights some important points in relation to services which both contractors and individual optometrists will need to consider. Please take time to read this update and share with colleagues in your practice.

COVID-19: Current Restriction Period

As it stands currently ophthalmic services across the UK are still noted as being in the College “Amber” phase with advice to prioritize urgent and essential over more ‘routine’ care, with the latter only being undertaken if capacity exists.

As in during the last period of national “lock down” ophthalmic services can remain open to see patients. This should be in line with national, local and professional body guidance to ensure public and patient safety. The current regulations, in Northern Ireland, as implemented by the Assembly, restrict movement, but allow healthcare access, including eye care.

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Optometry is an essential medical service, but it's also important we all do our best to ensure patient, staff and public safety by minimizing contacts outside households during this critical period of the pandemic.

The College of Optometrists advise careful triaging of all patients before appointments to ensure it's in a patient's best interest to attend. Ensure also you leave adequate time between appointments to ensure that examination rooms and dispensing areas are sufficiently cleaned. Practices should balance both the patient's risk of COVID -19 and their eye health when booking appointments. During these times, all asymptomatic routine patients at higher risk of COVID-19 should be offered the choice to defer their appointment.

Please continue to enforce strictly all the infection control policies remembering good respiratory hygiene and the "Hands, Face and Space" slogan.

There is currently no change to the existing PPE advice in respect of any of the new variants of the virus. The advice is the new strains are spread in exactly the same way.

Regarding PPE stocks, remember ONI have kindly been organising the issue to practices of the last batch received by the Health and Social Care Board. If you have not yet received and actioned their e mail communication please ensure you check your inbox regularly for details. The Health and Social Care Board once again would like to thank ONI and William Stockdale for help in managing with the distribution of the significant quantities of PPE supplies that have been procured and issued.

Updated Operational Guidance for Optometry Practices

Please note that the [operational guidance](#) for Ophthalmic Contractors has been updated to include:

1. Updated COVID-19 Screening Questionnaire (section 4.1). Please note the change in the duration of the symptoms from 14 days to 10 days in line with PHA advice and guidance.
2. Information on how to manage the situation where a member of staff tests positive for COVID-19 - section 3.3.1 (page 7) notes the updated advice in respect of COVID-19 positive staff

Please [click here](#) to read the operational guidance.

Please ensure that you check the Optometry COVID-19 webpage regularly for all updates: <http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/3120.htm>

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COVID-19 Vaccination Programme

Optometry Contractor practice staff are eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. The vaccination programme for front line health care staff is delivered by the Health and Social Care Trusts and information in regard to the process for booking vaccination appointment has been circulated to all contractors.

Contractors must ensure that **only their staff** access the vaccine via the programme made available through the Health and Social Care Trusts.

Information on the Vaccination Programme is hosted on the Optometry COVID-19 webpage: <http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/3120.htm>

Remote Consultations

It is important that optometry services like all other essential medical services do their best to ensure patient, staff and public safety by minimizing contacts outside households during this critical period of the pandemic.

Remote consultation, careful triage and risk assessment remain key elements in the care pathway prior to patient attendance for face to face ophthalmic care. Social distancing measures must remain in place and infection control procedures must be followed strictly. It is important to establish that any face to face contact is in a patient's' best interest, or if the routine check-up could wait until the circulating CV-19 numbers are less.

It is possible in many cases to reduce the time required for any face to face contacts by also adapting your routine e.g. do history and symptoms remotely. If you are consulting with patients remotely ensure you conduct any telephone/video consultation in a private place and check the patient is happy to have the conversation at that time also. You must remember to also keep accurate and contemporaneous records of any remote consultation and ensure these records are stored securely, similarly to if you had seen the patient in a face to face consultation.

It is important that optometry services are available and accessible to patients during this time and it is recognised that it is not "business as usual" so please continue to provide this essential care safely.

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Reminder of Claims Process for IOP Checks requested by the Hospital Eye Service

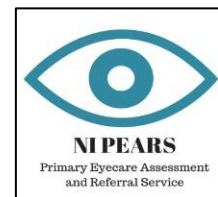
Contractors are reminded of the process for claiming for an IOP check requested by the Hospital Eye Service, the process was noted in MOS/333 (at this link). Please ensure that if you are undertaking an IOP check at the request of the HSCT that you should use the additional services eForm for claiming the relevant fee. Please do not submit this claim* under the Level I enhanced service for IOP Repeat Measures as the enhanced service is in place to support the refinement of a referral for OHT and for the purpose of determining if an OHT referral is indicated.

**exception applies for patients in the dedicated OHT monitoring service.*

NIPEARS

- **NIPEARS enrolment**

Any optometrist holding MECS 1 & 2 or who is an IP and has not yet signed up to provide NIPEARS but wishes to, please email ophthalmicservices@hscni.net to book a place on the upcoming online enrolment session.



- **Eye Casualty Referrals**

All Optometrists should please use the Optometry-Eye Casualty Referral form for all Eye Casualty referrals whether to the RVH or Altnagelvin. This provides eye casualty staff with essential information and will enable feedback to be provided to you from Eye Casualty clinicians. The Referral form and other important information and guidance can be accessed at the following link: [Optometry Referral Information](#)

- **Prior approval requests for a 2nd NIPEARS assessment within one year**

Practitioners are reminded that whilst there is the facility for a patient to have a second NIPEARS assessment within one year; these are in **exceptional cases only**. Practitioners are asked to consider carefully the need for the further NIPEARS before applying. Some Important points to consider are:

- Is the condition in the same eye as before and minor and non-sight threatening e.g. a recurrence of a hordeolum? If 'Yes' then a second NIPEARS is not required.

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- Is the condition presenting now in the other eye, but obvious through triage, and minor and non-sight threatening e.g. a sub conjunctival haemorrhage? If 'Yes' a second NIPEARS is not required.
- Has the patient previously been diagnosed with MGD/dry eye and are presenting symptoms similar? If 'Yes' a second NIPEARS is not required.
- Are the symptoms suggestive of a potentially sight threatening condition e.g. significant flashes and floaters? If 'Yes' then approval for a second NIPEARS may be requested.

Macular Service (Belfast Health and Social Care Trust)



December 2020: The opening of the new Modular Building for the Macular Service at Musgrave Park Hospital

The Macular Service has opened a new unit on the Musgrave Park Hospital site. Patients may be offered an appointment at either the clinic at the Mater Hospital or, at Musgrave Park Hospital. If you are referring a patient to the BHSCT Macular Service **please advise them to check carefully which clinic they are scheduled to attend.**

To view a short video describing the new unit please click on the link below:

<https://bit.ly/3pPfvn>

Cataract Pathway

You will be aware of pre-covid modernisation of the cataract pathway and of prototype modelling for three daycase elective care centres for cataract, based at South Tyrone, Mid Ulster, and Downe Hospitals.

Although these centres were performing well as a resource for the region, COVID has inevitably impacted on current service delivery. Theatre nursing teams have been redeployed to hospital wards or ICU and, although a level of pre- and post-operative assessment continues, cataract procedures are currently suspended in **all** three centres.

However, as with all surgical procedures, those for cataract are subject to a strict regional prioritisation exercise and a level of urgent surgical provision is currently being carried out by independent sector (IS) providers on behalf of HSC.

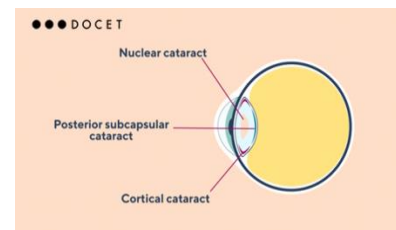
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As such, your patients may continue to be offered surgery, either in HSC or IS premises and theatres, until March 2021 and beyond.

As always, before contemplating referral, please ensure that it is in your patient's best interest to be referred at this time, and refer in accordance with previous HSC guidance. Triaging of recent referrals indicates that a proportion may be being referred too early, which may not be in the patient's or system's interest, and which may further delay those in most need.

Work is ongoing on the new primary care Optometry Post-Operative Cataract review and assessment service and it is hoped that it will be implemented later in the springtime.

DOCET's new three part series on cataract, which attracts 3 CET points, covers all relevant key areas and aims to ensure that all optometrists are updated on current practice and treatments, including postoperative care. All practitioners interested in providing the new service are strongly encouraged to view these as an update.



DOCET
Free high-quality CET for UK optometrists

Click on link: [DOCET](#)

General Ophthalmic Services

- **FSS Payment – January 2021**

An FSS2 payment has been made to all eligible contractors for January 2021. The FFS2 payment forms part of your overall payment and is not made separately. Although it is not visible on the OCS reports, it will be listed on the paper copy of practice payment report which is posted out on the day the payment is made.

For further information on the FSS2 scheme click on link below:

<http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/pdf/GOS%20FINANCIAL%20SUPPORT%20SCH EME%20220420-%20OUTLINE.pdf>

If you have a query in relation to the FSS please direct it in the first instance to BSO Ophthalmic Payments.

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- **Ophthalmic Listing for Contractors**

If you are an existing ophthalmic contractor and you are planning to open a new practice, take over an existing practice, or retire from or close your practice there are important steps that you must take in regards your status as a GOS contractor.

Please read the guidance in the link below which details the requirements for each contractor change scenario:

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

Personal Information

A certain level of personal practitioner information is held by BSO and HSCB to enable management of aspects of the provision of ophthalmic services. This is information that you provide on both the Ophthalmic Listing application and the Individual Practitioner enrolment application. The privacy notice in the link below details why and how your information is held by both BSO and HSCB.

<http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/2561.htm>

Ophthalmic Portal Access

As of end of January 2021, **258** out of **271** Ophthalmic Contractor practices have now established access to the HSC Optometry Portal. This enables them to submit claims electronically through the Ophthalmic Claims System (OCS) and have their dedicated practice HSCNI email account activated. This email account is the primary means of communication with contractor practices that use OCS for their service claims. In addition, the portal provides the facility for individual optometrists to access eReferral (via CCG) and the NIECR – the patient's electronic care record. If you are one of the Contractor practices that does not yet have HSC Optometry Portal access and would like to arrange access, or would like further information, please email ophthalmic.services@hscni.net in the first instance.

2020 CET Grant

The CET grant application period is now open. The closing date is **19th March 2021**. **No late applications can be accepted.** **MOS 334** detailing the application process, application form and BACS form for payment details for new applicants was issued to all HSC email accounts and individual email addresses that BSO holds. These documents may be accessed at: [MOS 334 CET Grant Application](#).

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Post Payment Verification (PPV): Assurances on ophthalmic service claims

Contractors were advised in [Bulletin No 10](#) of the resumption of the work of probity services in respect of post payment verification and the assurance of ophthalmic claims. It is the intention of BSO Counter Fraud and Probity Services in association with the HSCB to resume their work. The current considerations in respect of COVID-19 pandemic will mean that probity checks will be undertaken remotely by staff with clinical records (and any other records as may be required) being submitted to HSC for review and checking. Practices that are scheduled for a probity visit will be contacted in the incoming weeks to make arrangements for access to the records sampled and required for the assurance process.

Continued Professional Development and CET: Access to Training and Webinars

All health care professionals understand the vital importance of continued training and development as clinicians and Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians are no exceptions to this. Please ensure that you keep a check on the requirements for your continued registration with the GOC, especially as we enter the last year of the current cycle. **For practitioners who provide enhanced services in Northern Ireland please ensure you also fulfil any annual mandatory training requirements.** Please note the following opportunities for training:

1. **Northern Ireland Optometric Society webinar: Tuesday 2nd February - 7.30pm “Glaucoma management through the challenging times of COVID” – Dr Maria Napier Consultant Ophthalmologist Glaucoma Service BHSCT.**

Please note that this event has been approved for LES 2 Mandatory Training for 2021 but is open to all practitioners. To register please visit the NIOS website: www.nios.org.uk

2. **HSCB Webinar: Tuesday 9th Feb at 12.15pm. “Interpreting OCTs and how to decide what to refer” - Mr Stuart McGimpsey Consultant Ophthalmologist and Clinical Lead for the Regional Macular Service, BHSCT.**

Please click on the registration link below if you wish to attend this event: <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/7489246898573585935>

3. **HSCB Webinar: Monday 29th March at 12noon. “Question and answer discussion on common casualty conditions” with Dr Deirdre Burns, Specialist Optometrist BHSCT.**

Please note that this event has been approved for PEARS Mandatory Training for 2021 but is open to all practitioners. *Watch out for the option to send in questions for this session beforehand.*

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/3545961696184601359>

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4. **HSCB Webinar: Tuesday 20th April – 6:00pm to 7:00pm. “Glaucoma Referrals: Who, Why and When – How to ensure they are appropriate” – Ms M Lagan, Consultant Ophthalmologist BHSCT.**

Please note that this event has been approved for LES 2 Mandatory Training for 2021 but is open to all practitioners.

Please click on the registration link below if you wish to attend this event:

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/233106772701510928>

Please note: Training events are open to all but only Optometrists who have an NI GOS personal code will receive CET points where they have been approved for an event.

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

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

- Janice McCrudden: janice.mccrudden@hscni.net
- Fiona North: fiona.north@hscni.net
- Margaret McMullan: margaret.mcullan@hscni.net
- Scott Drummond: scott.drummond@hscni.net
- General email: ophthalmic.services@hscni.net



COVID-19 Pandemic Online Resources:

- **HSC Optometry COVID-19 information:**
Current page: <http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/3120.htm>
Archive page: <http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/3225.htm>
- **COVID-19 Public Health Agency:** <https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/>
- **General Optical Council:**
https://www.optical.org/en/news_publications/Publications/joint-statement-and-guidance-on-coronavirus-covid19.cfm
- **College of Optometrists:** <https://www.college-optometrists.org/the-college/media-hub/news-listing/coronavirus-2019-advice-for-optometrists.html>
- **Association of Optometrists:** <https://www.aop.org.uk/coronavirus-updates>