

OPHTHALMIC SERVICES

COVID-19 UPDATE: No: 15 22 December 2021

This again has been a very challenging year and the impact of covid, and now the new Omicron variant, will have a deep and lasting impact on us all, personally and professionally.

HSC Board would like to once again extend sincere thanks and appreciation for the remarkable efforts of primary care optometrists in maintaining services, and indeed in embracing new models of care in the glaucoma, cataract, and acute eye pathways.

This is truly remarkable, and much appreciated across HSC system in not only rebuilding primary care optometry services, but also integrating across secondary care and GP pathways to maintain services and help with wider system rebuild and pressure.

Please take a few moments to read some important updates below, don't forget to look after **you**, and Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all.

Raymond Curran, Head of Ophthalmic Services.

Important: Managing Patients with Urgent Eye Problems During the Christmas and New Year Period

It is **essential** that all practices have clear, straightforward information for patients on the practice opening times during the holiday period and how the patient may access emergency care if they have an urgent eye problem that cannot wait. You are advised to have a message on your telephone and on your practice website, Facebook[®] page or other social media platform that you use.

The message should be clear and give information on the practice opening hours and **state that if the practice is closed and the patient has a very urgent problem that cannot wait, they should contact their nearest hospital Emergency Department.**

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If your practice is to be closed for longer than the public holiday period you may wish to consider a “buddy” arrangement with another practice for managing your patients with minor acute eye problems

Please take time to consider the above and ensure that you have a clear and concise advice message for patients when they contact your practice when it is closed. Please ensure that you ‘test’ the message prior to activating it.

See below for Eye Casualty Services opening times during the holidays.

1. BHSCT Eye Casualty Service

This service will be **closed on Christmas Day 2021**. Patients with an eye emergency will be directed to attend their local ED. This has been advised through BHSCT social media.

On Boxing Day (26th), Mon 27th & Tues 28th Dec and on New Year’s Day, Sun 2nd and Mon 3rd there will be half day cover as follows:

Clinical advice line, for practitioner use only, for triage advice and to arrange appointments available 8.30 – 1pm.

On these days appointments will be available from 8.30am -10am and 1pm -3pm for patients whom Eye Casualty deems require an appointment. Outside 8.30-1pm on these days for urgent cases contact the RVH switchboard tel: 028 90 240503 and ask for the ophthalmologist on call.

On Weds 29th and Thursday 30th and from Tuesday 4th Eye Casualty hours as normal

Reminder: no walk-in patients are accepted in BHSCT Eye Casualty they must all have an appointment arranged by their optometrist, GP or the main ED/Urgent Care Centre to attend. Please **do not** direct patients to the make contact with BHSCT Eye Casualty via the patient advice line themselves.

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2. WHSCT Emergency Eye Clinic/Service

Practitioners should contact Altnagelvin Hospital switchboard tel: 028 71 345171, as usual, and ask for the ophthalmologist on call.

As with BHSCT above, patients cannot, and should not, ring directly and should be advised to contact their nearest Emergency Department if they have a very urgent problem that cannot wait.

Reminder: no walk-in patients are accepted in WHSCT Emergency Eye Clinic, they must all have an appointment arranged by their optometrist, GP or the main ED/ Urgent Care Centre to attend.

General Advice from the Eye Casualty Services when you need to refer a patient.

1. **Always telephone** Eye Casualty/Emergency Eye Clinic before sending a patient to the service as only patients with appointments will be seen. **No walk in patients will be accepted by both Health and Social Care Trusts.** Please note: Ophthalmic Services have been advised that GPs have received the same advice.

2. Contact Numbers for use by Optometry Practices.

BHSCT Eye Casualty: clinical advice line tel no: 028961500953

Usual hours of clinic are Mon – Friday 8.30 - 6pm and Sat & Sun 8.30 - 1pm.

For out of hours urgent cases that cannot wait until Eye Casualty next open contact RVH telephone switchboard tel: 90240503 and ask for the ophthalmologist on call.

WHSCT Eye Casualty: telephone Altnagelvin Hospital switchboard tel: 028 71 345171 and ask for the ophthalmologist-on-call.

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3. BHSCT Eye Casualty CCG eReferral pilot

A new Eye Casualty referral pathway using CCG is being developed and is due to be tested by Belfast Trust (RVH) Eye Casualty.

Practices in the Belfast LCG area have been invited to take part in a 3 month pilot which commences on 1st January 2022.

If the pilot is successful the new pathway will be rolled to all optometry and GP practices across NI later in the year

Important: The BHSCT Eye Casualty Pilot destination is visible on CCG from 17th December 2021. The pilot will be live from 1st January but optometrists **MUST NOT** use it unless you are a practice in the Belfast area that has been accepted onto the pilot. All other practices across NI must continue to refer using the clinical advice line and paper referral until informed otherwise.

Any practice in the Belfast LCG area who has not yet signed up to the pilot but would like to, it's not too late. Please email Fiona North at fiona.north@hscni.net for more information.

4. GP Acute Eyecare Guidance:

Information has been issued to GP practices advising on appropriate use of NIPEARS and advice to give to patients.

Click link: [GP Acute Eyecare Information: NIPEARS triage](#). Please refer to this guidance should you need to contact GP practices about inappropriate referrals to NI PEARS from their practice

Update on Service Developments

The HSCB would like to thank all the practices that responded to the recent call for expression of interest in the OHT Review and Monitoring Service extension in the Western and Northern Trust areas.



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Following engagement with the practices and the glaucoma service in the Western Health and Social Trust area 17 practices will be joining the list of providers of this service, bringing the total number of practices providing the service regionally to 55. The HSCB would also like to acknowledge and thank the practices involved in the service for their continued support and efforts to sustain and grow the service in collaboration with the Trusts and HSC.

Reminder: HSCNI email accounts | CCG eReferral | NIECR

Contractors that access the FPS Optometry Portal are reminded of the importance of access to their HSCNI email accounts, eReferral via CCG and NIECR.

- ✓ **HSCNI EMAIL:** All HSC communications are now issued to contractor HSCNI email accounts so **it is vital that these accounts are checked on a daily basis**
- ✓ **CCG eReferral:** All practices using the HSC Portal should also be utilising referral via CCG and should not be using paper referrals when the capability to send an eReferral is in place
- ✓ **NIECR:** All Optometrists are eligible to apply for an NIECR account and contractors should encourage Optometrists working in practice to apply for an NIECR account if they do not already have one. For Optometrists that have an NIECR account please make optimum use of this valuable resource when dealing with patients – **you should always refer to NIECR:**
 - If your patient is known to attend the hospital eye service
 - If a new patient makes any reference to hospital eye services during history and symptom taking
 - If you are deciding to refer a patient
 - If your patient provides any other indications of previous medical or related conditions which may have resulted in attendance at any hospital eye clinic

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The recent glaucoma service webinar held by HSCB on 6th December gave several examples where access to NIECR was indicated and would have been of help and benefit in patient management but had not been accessed (link to webinar: <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/recording/3377498929431718672> should you wish to view it). **Use of NIECR will only take a few seconds and minutes but can give you helpful and valuable information on a patient to ensure your management of the patient is always optimum.**

If you require a password reset for any of the above user accounts (practice email, CCG, NIECR) please contact the BSO IT Help Desk on 028 9536 2400 or via email: supportteam@hscni.net

If you have problems with your HSC Optometry portal access and/or access to the applications hosted on the portal please refer your query to eBusiness@hscni.net or call the eBusiness team on **028 9536 0333** selecting option 1 then option 4

New Guidance: RCOphth New Clinical Guideline for the Management of Angle-Closure Glaucoma

You may have noted in recent weeks the publication of a consultation by the Royal College of Ophthalmologists (RCOphth) on a new Clinical Guideline for the management of Angle-Closure Glaucoma; in addition a recent College of Optometrists webinar (8th December) covered this subject. Although still currently in DRAFT form for consultation and not yet agreed as a final guideline you are encouraged to read the proposed guideline as elements of this guideline directly impact on you as a primary care optometrist when dealing with patients with suspect ACG.

Please access the draft guideline at the following link: [The-Management-of-Angle-Closure-Glaucoma-Clinical-Guidelines.pdf \(rcophth.ac.uk\)](https://www.rcophth.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/The-Management-of-Angle-Closure-Glaucoma-Clinical-Guidelines.pdf)

It is anticipated that when the final guideline is published for implementation that HSCB will communicate with primary care contractors and their optometrists as to the practical considerations of the new guideline for clinical practice here in N.Ireland.

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This may include advice on referral and also advice in respect of patient eligibility for GOS.

CPD 2022

As you know 2022 will see the CPD cycle begin. The GOC will advise you of the changes to your own account.

HSCB/BSO currently has one session in January under the new scheme arranged.

Dr Louise Lusk will present on “Headaches and how to manage presentations in practice”. Mon 10th January 2022, 9.15 - 10.30.

The link to book is

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/3736178312408460048>

1 CPD point is available and we look forward to seeing you there.

PLEASE ENSURE YOU HAVE ACCEPTED ALL YOUR CET POINTS ON YOUR GOC CET ACCOUNT TO ENSURE YOUR CONTINUED REGISTRATION.

If you have any queries 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

COVID-19 Pandemic Online Resources:

- HSC Optometry COVID-19 information:
<http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/3120.htm>

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- COVID-19 Public Health Agency Advice: <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>