

OPHTHALMIC SERVICES

COVID-19 UPDATE No 4

29 APRIL 2020

- **COVID-19:** For all relevant COVID-19 pandemic information please ensure that you check the webpage
<http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/3120.htm>
- **Financial Support (FSS):** Please note that **each month** the Ophthalmic Department in the **BSO** will communicate the information in relation to the Financial Support Scheme (FSS) for Ophthalmic Contractors. If you are applying for the FSS please ensure that you complete your applications by the stated deadline, BSO have advised that late applications will not be accepted.
- **Weekly monitoring report:** HSC Board would like to thank contractors for submission, via Survey Monkey, to the weekly Ophthalmic Services Report. In normal circumstances an 87% return rate (the week 1 figure) would be commendable; in this case contractors are reminded that failure to submit a return may affect payments made under the Financial Support Scheme. The monitoring report gives assurances on staffing and activity, and also helps HSC Board to plan appropriate levels of service, and of planned PPE, now and as we prepare for phased recovery. The survey also offered the opportunity for GOS providers to submit comments and questions. These are welcomed for giving insights on contractor and provider concerns and ideas. These issues are something HSC Board is keen to take up in a planned webinar very soon.
- **Monthly Urgent Care Activity Recording Spreadsheet:** Contractors are reminded that the Monthly Activity Spreadsheet for April must be returned to BSO by 5th May to enable processing and payment for Urgent Care activity to be made in May. This spreadsheet is being replaced by a web based claim form from 1st May; information will be sent out on this shortly.
- **Annual Optometry Assurance Returns for 2019-20:** Contractors are advised that the annual assurance returns process in relation to Enhanced Services and Quality Assurance has been deferred for several weeks. The practice allowance which is paid on submission of completed returns will still be available to Contractors on completion of the process. It is anticipated that the annual assurance process will be undertaken during May 2020.

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- **Potential Redeployment:** If the need arises practices may be asked to volunteer staff for redeployment, where possible, but it is recognised that some staff may not be in a position to be redeployed due to their personal circumstances.
- **Practice Contact:** Contractors are reminded to ensure that, where possible, practice answering machines or, telephone divert, provide adequate information on how advice and services can be accessed.
- **Public information:** The HSCB communications team have issued advice to the public on the HSCB website and through social media advising on how to access all of the primary care services including optometry. People with any concerns about their eyecare are advised to contact their local optometrist. The information can be viewed at the following link:
[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) - HSCB](#)
- **Evidence of Key Worker Status:** Please [click here](#) for the template letter which you can use to evidence that you are a key worker. You are permitted to use this should you be asked to provide evidence that you are a key worker whilst travelling to and from work. HSCB has posted a quota of **car stickers** to all contractor practices, denoting HSC key worker status which may be displayed by key workers when traveling for the purpose of work. If you require further car stickers please email ophthalmic.services@hscni.net

Urgent Clinical Services

For the time of the COVID-19 pandemic **urgent** eyecare includes:

- telephone consultation of acute eye problems
- video consultation of acute eye problems
- in practice face-to-face examination of acute eye problems

Telephone calls from or to a patient for the purposes of asking questions in order to decide whether the patient requires a remote consultation with an optometrist do not need to be recorded and cannot be claimed for.

If you are providing 'urgent' care please ensure that you read and follow the guidance on 'urgent' eye care provision hosted at the following link:

http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/pdf/OPH_COVID-19_UrgentCareGuidance_%20230420.pdf

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Coronavirus testing for Primary Care Optometry staff

Coronavirus testing is now available for Optometry staff providing eyecare services who are self-isolating due to coronavirus-like symptoms, or because a member of their household has symptoms. Symptoms include a new continuous cough and/ or high temperature. Please see the letter at the following link for further information

http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/pdf/HSCB-LTR_InterimProtocolCovid19Testing_280420.pdf

Anyone who believes they are eligible should use the online booking portal for the National Testing Programme which can be accessed via NI Direct or [PHA website](#). They should discuss the result with their employer.

Test results will be returned within 72 hours – until these are received individuals should continue to follow the self-isolation advice.

Diabetic Screening Service during COVID 19

Routine diabetic retinopathy screening appointments across Northern Ireland have been postponed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Patients have been advised to contact their optometrist if they experience any problems. A press release has been issued giving patients this advice and can be viewed at the following link.

<http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/pdf/RNIB%20Press%20Release.pdf>

NICE Guidance: Patients with Severe Asthma

Please see attached link to the new NICE guideline – NG166 – [COVID-19 rapid guideline: severe asthma](#)

All COVID -19 guidelines from NICE have immediate endorsement in N.Ireland. NICE have developed these recommendations in direct response to the rapidly evolving situation.

The recommendations are based on evidence and expert opinion and have been verified as far as possible.

This may help you in your decision making and clinical management of patients or staff who may have asthma.

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Please, in all cases

- ✓ *Give telephone advice where appropriate*
- ✓ *Only arrange a face- to-face assessment if it is in the patient's best interest*
- ✓ *Carefully consider the risk of COVID-19 exposure*
- ✓ *Be mindful that 'normal' practice and protocols need to be adapted*

Ophthalmic Advice and Support

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

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>

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>