

The Road to Rebuilding

Over the past 2-3 weeks and following direction from the Department of Health (DoH), Ophthalmic Services in HSCB have been working to plan for the reintroduction of primary care ophthalmic services. An essential part of this work was to gather feedback and information in respect of the preparedness of primary care optometry contractors for service reintroduction and to gain insight into the challenges which the profession will face in the immediate COVID-19 recovery phase, acknowledging the uncertainty that exists including any potential for a second wave and surge and any unknown impact that this would have.



It was important that this work was methodical, meaningful and inclusive. It was acknowledged from the outset that the work would be complex with several phases and that input from relevant stakeholders would be required at different stages. The first step was to focus on primary care ophthalmic services and what would be needed to reinstate services safely, effectively and confidently across the contractor base. It was important that all contractors had an opportunity to contribute to the work and as such, all contractors were encouraged to complete a survey, with a small number of contractors and representatives of ONI also providing feedback via a working group meeting. The return rate to the survey was 75% and is therefore highly representative of the contractor base. The HSCB would like to thank each and every one of you who contributed to this work, both the survey and the meeting; your feedback was vital and valued. It is now important that you are advised of the next steps as we move forward. The information provided to HSCB from contractors highlighted the many challenges *and* the 'positives' which COVID-19 has generated for primary care optometry. It is understood that the challenges are not unique to Optometry spanning the entire HSC system and include financial, workplace, workforce challenges. It was important that the challenges for Optometry were articulated in formulating a report to inform the planning for service rebuilding.

So.....what is next?

On Friday 5th June the HSCB provided an interim report to DoH on the engagement work for rebuilding services that has taken place over the past 2 weeks. The report proposed a progress pathway for primary care ophthalmic services which will feed into the overall HSC Rebuilding Framework. This Framework encompasses all HSC services and is the framework which plans for the rebuilding of services on a system wide basis. As such this initial piece of work is only the first step of many for primary care ophthalmic services due to the intrinsic link to secondary care services.

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However it is **essential at this specific point in time** that the focus is the reintroduction of primary care services that were provided pre-COVID-19 pandemic, with the later steps dealing with how primary care developments will assist the work of the Northern Ireland Eyecare Network. It is important to note that the trajectory of the pathway will be influenced by Public Health, Department of Health and Northern Ireland Executive guidance and recommendations. Expert advice and information will guide the actual timings for steps in the progress pathway, whilst policy and operational decisions will enable the steps in the progress pathway to be taken.

It is anticipated that over the incoming days discussions will take place to bring forward agreement on these first steps; these discussions need to generate decisions and agreement on the following key points:

- decision in respect of a proposed “date” for service reinstatement in the very near future
- decision on the types of services that will be reinstated
- decision on how assurances are received that workplaces and the workforce are safe
- decisions on what level of support, if any can be provided both financially and also in regard to PPE
- decisions on how HSC communicate important information to the public about services being reinstated and how optometry practices will need to change their physical space and approaches to care provision

Preparedness

HSCB will endeavour to give all contractors 7-10 days’ notice of the agreed date of service reinstatement. In addition HSCB will be required to obtain assurances from ALL contractors in respect of core requirements for service reinstated, this assurance declaration will be mandatory. However, whilst these deliberations are taking place it is important that contractors continue and consolidate their preparations for service reinstatement.

HSCB are aware that contractors have been working hard to make physical modifications to their practice to ensure compliance with social distancing, and also to review and amend their practice protocols and processes to ensure the patient ‘journey’ when they attend is safe and efficient. In addition many are taking the necessary steps to un-furlough staff in preparation for service resumption. However there are some other elements of every day practice which HSCB would ask that you bear in mind and address in the incoming days and weeks:

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HSCNI email, CCG and NIECR

- Contractors must ensure that they log into and check their practice HSCNI email account, and going forward, that this is checked on a daily basis. Some secondary care services (e.g. BSHCT glaucoma service) are contacting practices via their HSCNI email account and it is essential that these communications are dealt with in a timely manner. If you require a password reset for this account please contact the IT helpdesk using the contact details noted above.
- If you are not a user of CCG or NIECR you are strongly advised to arrange to get access to both of these applications. Going forward it is more important than ever that the referral pathway is electronic and that an optometrist utilises the NIECR to help inform their clinical practice and decision making. **Please contact one of the HSCB advisers to discuss this.**
- If you/your optometrists have access to CCG, please ensure that on return to practice that CCG is the chosen method for your referrals at all times. Therefore please ensure that if you/ your optometry staff need their CCG account password reset that you request this in preparation for return to work. CCG passwords cannot be reset by HSCB staff; you must contact the IT help desk to request this by email to supportteam@hscni.net or by calling 028 9536 2400.
- Use of NIECR should help in clinical practice by allowing an optometrist to check records of ophthalmic care provided by the HES, current medications etc.... It allows you to see if the patient has already been referred by another optometrist also (if sent via CCG). Please ensure that if you need your NIECR account password reset that you also contact the IT helpdesk about this using the contact details above.

Other considerations

- Please ensure that your practice staff gain access to Infection Prevention and Control training (including use of PPE). HSCB are investigating options for this but you are encouraged to ensure that all staff receive training.
- Please review and update your processes for the management of complaints and reporting of adverse incidents.

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Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Contractors will know that HSCB were originally able to secure a 3 month emergency stock of PPE which was distributed to all contractor practices with the much appreciated help of ONI. HSCB is continuing to seek to secure a further supply of PPE and as soon as feedback on this request is received all contractors will be advised. As you will all be only too aware PPE is a valuable and scarce resource. As such its use is subject scrutiny and audit, as with any resource, to ensure appropriate use and fair distribution. Please ensure that you follow the guidance provided to contractors in relation to the use and disposal of PPE, available on the Optometry COVID-19 webpage (items 27 and 28) or [click here](#).

<http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/3120.htm>

Annual Governance Returns (Quality Assurance and Enhanced Services)

Contractors will receive communication this week in relation to the annual QA and Enhanced services returns. This is the return associated with the practice allowance and following return (and closure of any follow up) the payment of the practice allowance will be processed. **Please ensure that you complete this return as soon as possible.**

Financial Support Scheme (FSS) Monitoring

A Reminder..... All contractors that have received the FSS are required to complete weekly FSS assurance monitoring. Please ensure that you complete weekly returns via the established Survey Monkey by **5pm on the Monday of the following week.**

Service Provision

(i)Essential Eye Care

Contractors and Optometrists are reminded of the process for provision of essential GOS sight tests, vouchers or repair/replacements for eligible patients. Requests for these should be sent to priorapproval.bso@hscni.net and following authorisation should be submitted via OCS.

(ii)Specific Requests for Services from secondary care

HSCB are aware that on occasion Contractors have been requested by secondary care to provide one-off clinical assessments including measurement of IOP. Please note that the online eForm for urgent care has been updated to include the option to claim for the provision of an IOP measurement. The remuneration for this service is the same as the existing Level I service (IOP Repeat Measures).

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(iii) Urgent Care

Optometrists are advised to carefully consider their approach to the triage of patients with flashes and floaters and the need to consider how these presenting symptoms can best be investigated. It is recommended that these patients are assessed in the face to face setting with appropriate PPE and social distancing arrangements in place. For patients with flashes and floaters who may sit within any of the categories of increased vulnerability, please consider carefully your approach to this and if necessary seek advice from emergency eye clinic.

Recent HSCB Ophthalmic Services Webinar

HSCB hope that you found the webinar held on 2nd June useful, 300 participants joined the event and your support is appreciated. HSCB would like to thank Mr David Armstrong (Clinical Lead for Eye Casualty in Belfast HSCT) for his presentation. It is appreciated that the presentation was not a clinical presentation that you may have been expecting, but it was felt important at this point to share the plans for BHSCT Eye Casualty and to hear these directly from David. Thank you for all the additional questions and comments. A summary of the questions posed along with HSCB responses will be provided next week. In addition it is hoped that a link to a recording of the event will be made available, as attendance was limited to 300 people; please accept HSC apologies to those who were unable to join because of this limit. HSCB plan to hold a more clinically focussed webinar event within the next few weeks to support urgent eyecare / NIPEARS provision.

HSC COVID-19 communications

Please ensure that you continue to check the Optometry COVID-19 webpage for all relevant information and updates. Please also share the following link with your staff and colleagues who may not be working currently to ensure they are kept abreast of all information relevant to ophthalmic services:

<http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/3120.htm>

In particular you are asked to note the following hosted on the webpage:

- BHSCT Eye Casualty Guidance (item 29)
- NIA-2020-02 Risks associated with alcohol based hand sanitisers (item 30)
- HSS(MD) 35-2020 – Covid-19 Case Definition Change ([click here](#))
- HSS(MD) 38-2020 - Covid-19 Contact Tracing Strategy & Programme in Northern Ireland ([click here](#))

In addition to the above, HSCB have also provided further information to GP practices on the arrangements which are in place for primary care Optometry practices at this time.

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****** 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>