

Resumption of Ophthalmic Services

Following resumption of the majority of Ophthalmic Services as part of the Phase 1 Rebuilding HSC Services work the HSCB would like to take this opportunity to thank all Ophthalmic Contractors for their continued commitment to service provision. The HSCB also thank everyone who has provided input and support to the work to rebuild and reinstate services, with the first step in the 'rebuilding' being the resumption of GOS and Enhanced Services from 29th June 2020. This first step is supported by the extension of the existing Financial Support Scheme (FSS) for July and August 2020, with new arrangements for financial support taking effect from September onwards.

This Bulletin outlines some of the key considerations for Contractors and individual optometrists, as you return to work following the period of COVID-19 restrictions which were in place from 24th March. As always you are advised to keep abreast of the most up to date information and guidance from all relevant sources including HSC (*including the PHA, HSCB, BSO*), GOC, College of Optometrists and other organisations which provide guidance and support for Optometrists, employers and businesses. In addition Optometry Northern Ireland as your representative body is an important point of contact for Contractors.

Readiness for Resumption

The HSCB appreciate that as Contractors you have been preparing for the resumption of services for several weeks and that you will have both workplace and workforce planning completed. To complement and support your planning the HSCB have provided operational guidance for all Contractors, this is an 'addition' to other information and professional guidance available to you; is neither exhaustive nor exclusive (please [click here](#) to read the operational guidance). As contractors for HSC funded eyecare services you are required to complete a COVID-19 Practice Assurance return as part of the rebuilding and reinstatement of services. Please ensure that, if you are the contractor for more than one practice, you complete a return for **each** practice.

If you have not already submitted your COVID-19 Practice Assurance return please scan code or, click the link below.



<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/DSX7FV9>

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Guidance on Services: GOS and NI PEARS (Claiming Process)

Please ensure that you read and follow the MOS guidance (**MOS 333**) which was issued on Friday 26th June 2020. This provides you with the necessary information to ensure that you follow the correct procedures for claim submission. [Click here](#) to read the MOS 333 guidance on the resumption of services and claim processes (for GOS and Enhanced Services).

It is important to note that the service specification for NI PEARS has been amended and is effective as of 29th June 2020. There are some important updates to the NI PEARS service specification including amendments to the eligibility criteria and the inclusion of remote consultations. All Contractors providing NI PEARS and all individual optometrists accredited to provide the service **must** read and adhere to the revised service specification. [Click here](#) to read the NI PEARS service specification (*revised June 2020*). There are two significant changes to the NIPEARS service specification and the resulting claim process changes are detailed in MOS 333.

A key priority and objective for the HSC in the system-wide rebuilding of services is to retain and scale up any new and innovative ways of working which COVID-19 has generated. For primary care Optometry services these new ways of working are evidenced in the provision of 'remote consultations' for non-sight threatening new and acute eye conditions. Remote 'consultation' is distinct from remote 'triage' in that the former (remote consultation) is undertaken by a registered practitioner, see note below, whereas remote triage is where staff undertake to determine what problems exist and how they might be addressed. In some cases remote triage by a member of staff may lead to a remote consultation being undertaken by a practitioner.

NOTE: Remote 'consultations'/assessments (either by telephone, video or other means) should only be undertaken by an Optometrist/OMP and will involve elements of a normal eye examination, except for the tests and procedures provided in a face to face consultation. The Optometrist should ensure careful and clear recording of history, signs and symptoms and the diagnosis and subsequent management or treatment plan. All advice and recommendations provided to the patient should be clearly recorded in the patient's clinical record as usual.

Contractors will note in the guidance on claim submission the process for claiming for remote consultations (*including any subsequent face-to-face assessment which might follow a remote*). Please ensure that you follow the guidance in [MOS 333](#) in respect of the submission of claims for 'remote consultations'. Please also ensure that you disseminate this information to ALL Optometrists providing NI PEARS in your practice (full-time, part-time and locum).

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HSCNI email, CCG and NIECR

- **Practice HSCNI email accounts**

As outlined in Bulletin No 7 ([click here](#)) contractors that are using the HSC Optometry portal for their claims must check their practice HSCNI email accounts daily. If you require a password reset for this account please contact the IT helpdesk on 028 9536 2400 or, email supportteam@hscni.net

During the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic and whilst restrictions were in place, HSCB issued all communications twice – to practice HSCNI emails and to an alternative business continuity email. The HSCB will consider the viability and appropriateness of this ‘dual’ communication going forward now that practices are open and services have resumed.

- **eReferral via CCG and NIECR**

As stated in [Bulletin No 7](#), if you are not a user of CCG or NIECR you are strongly advised to arrange to have 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. Use of NIECR helps 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.

Please contact one of the HSCB advisers to discuss the use of eReferral and NIECR if you do not have access to this.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

HSCB are continuing to engage with the Department of Health and BSO supply chain for PPE and have escalated the need for it in General Ophthalmic Services, however no assurances exist going forward that any additional supplies will be available to optometry through HSCB. Currently all areas of HSC services now require PPE and as such, it is an extensive procurement project that has large budgetary implications and therefore is likely to take some time for a decision to be made as to what can be supplied and to whom. The HSCB will continue to highlight the need for PPE for Ophthalmic Contractors and in the interim should contractors wish to view an updated supply list from the DoH advising on where to obtain products from *click on link below, last updated Friday 19th June 2020*:

<http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/pdf/PPE%20Supply%20List.xlsx>

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Financial Support Scheme (FSS)

Contractors will have received the letter from Mr Paul Montgomery, Director of General Healthcare Policy, DoH outlining the arrangements for Financial Support Scheme (FSS) following resumption of services. As noted in the communication, the current FSS will remain in place for July and August but from September a new Financial Support Scheme will be implemented.

1. Please ensure that you complete weekly FSS monitoring returns via the established Survey Monkey by **5pm on the Monday of the following week**. The weekly survey will continue during July and August while the current FSS is in place.
2. The BSO will be managing the process for FSS and please ensure that you act on all BSO communications in respect of the FSS when advised.

HSCB Ophthalmic Services Webinars – Keeping you informed

Please note two upcoming webinars being hosted by HSCB:

- **MONDAY 6th July 2020 (6.30 – 7pm)**
“MANAGING RECOMMENCEMENT OF GOS AND ENHANCED SERVICES”
[Register Now!](#)
- **TUESDAY 4th August 2020 (6.30pm-7:30pm)**
NI PEARS accredited CPD session with Dr David Armstrong, Clinical Lead for Eye Casualty, BHSCT
**Registration details to follow*

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>

Can you help a colleague?

BHSCT Research Optometrist Rebecca Cairns requires access to a **Haag-Streit Octopus 900 perimeter** for collaboration on a research project. If you have this

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ophthalmic equipment and are willing to help please email:

RebeccaM.Cairns@belfasttrust.hscni.net

Thank you from HSCB.....

Over the past 3 months, COVID-19 has shaken and unsettled every level of society, with each sector facing stress and difficulties which 6 months ago would have been unimaginable. The Health and Social Care Board wish to thank you all as Contractors for your commitment to ophthalmic services and your professional support in adherence to the strict but vital restrictions, to help in the protection of public health.

As we collectively move forward in Phase 1 and beyond, HSCB trust that you will feel confident in the approach taken to rebuilding services. It is hoped that working with you, Optometry Northern Ireland and other stakeholders, spanning primary and secondary care, we can rebuild services adopting a confident and methodical approach. There are many uncertainties ahead but there are also many opportunities to seize and direct the momentum of the wave which COVID-19 has generated.

**** 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>

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