

## NORTHERN IRELAND PRIMARY CARE OPTOMETRY ENHANCED SERVICE

### NIPEARS Extension: NIPEARS Plus Pilot Service Specification March 2023

#### 1. BACKGROUND

This is a pilot to trial an extension to the Northern Ireland Primary Eyecare Assessment and Referral Service (NIPEARS). NIPEARS is an optometric enhanced service for patients who present with acute eye problems. This extension to the service, known as NIPEARS Plus, is provided by optometrists qualified as Independent Prescribers (IP optometrists) and Ophthalmic Medical Practitioners (OMPs) for patients who are symptomatic of specific acute eye conditions who would otherwise require management to completion by HSC Trust/ Eye Casualty services in Northern Ireland. It facilitates IP optometrists/OMPs to manage patients with these specific conditions, that are outside the scope of non-IP qualified practitioners in regards provision of management and treatment for the condition. These patients will be directed to the IP optometrists from Belfast Trust Eye Casualty during the pilot period.

#### 2. EVIDENCE BASE

The evidence to support the provision of this extension to the NIPEARS Enhanced Service is found within:

- Developing Eyecare Partnerships: Improving the Commissioning and Provision of Eyecare Services in Northern Ireland. DHSSPS October 2012.

[Developing Eyecare Partnerships: Improving the Commissioning and Provision of Eyecare Services in Northern Ireland](#)

- Southern Primary Eyecare Assessment and Referral Service Pilot "SPEARS": Pilot Evaluation Report, HSCB March 2016

[.SPEARS PILOT REPORT\SPEARS Evaluation Report March 2016.pdf](#)

- Northern Ireland Eyecare Network
- Commissioning Better Eyecare. Joint guidance by the Royal College of Ophthalmologists and the College of Optometrists

### **3. AIM**

The aim of the NIPEARS Plus service is to make use of the clinical skills of primary care IP optometrists and ophthalmic medical practitioners (OMPs) to provide appropriate and timely care for patients presenting with specific acute conditions, enabling the patients where possible to be managed to completion in primary care, who would otherwise have to attend secondary care.

### **4. OBJECTIVES**

- To make optimum use of clinically skilled primary care optometrists.
- To facilitate primary care IP optometrists and OMPs within NIPEARS to manage patients with specific acute eye conditions to completion within the primary care setting with clinical support from secondary care if required e.g. through the Eye Casualty clinical advice line.
- To facilitate appropriate access to eye care for patients with specific conditions rapidly and as closer to home as possible.
- To reduce the number of patients requiring specialist secondary care ophthalmology services.
- To ensure an appropriate and timely pathway for those patients who do require rapid onward referral to specialist ophthalmology services.
- To optimise the inter-professional interface including communication, relationships and awareness of professional services between:
  - a) Primary care optometrists through inter practice referral and communication.
  - b) Primary care clinicians: GPs, community pharmacists and optometrists
  - c) Primary care optometry and secondary care ophthalmology, in particular, Eye Casualty services.

To promote public health messages in relation to eye health including prevention of eye injuries and promotion of self-care

### **5. SERVICE SPECIFICATION**

#### **5.1 OVERALL CONTRACTOR RESPONSIBILITY**

- a) The Contractor is responsible for all aspects of the service provision in line with this service specification,
- b) It is the contractor's responsibility to ensure that the individual practitioners (IP optometrists) providing the service on their behalf are eligible to do so.

- c) The contractor will be required to sign an annual enhanced service agreement and will be required to provide annual assurances in respect of the enhanced service provision.

## **5.2 INDIVIDUAL PRACTITIONER ELIGIBILITY – TRAINING AND ACCEPTANCE AS A PROVIDER**

The following criteria must be fulfilled for individual practitioner accreditation to provide the extended Enhanced service NI PEARS Plus.

- a) Current registration with the GOC or GMC registration as relevant.
- b) Hold the Independent Prescriber qualification or be a registered Ophthalmic Medical Practitioner.
- c) Hold a valid and current NI personal code for provision of General Ophthalmic Services in Northern Ireland.
- d) If an optometrist, be registered as a Non-Medical Prescriber with the HSCB and hold an HS21 prescription pad.
- e) Be accredited to provide NIPEARS and currently providing the service.
- f) Have attended an SPPG session to be formally accepted to provide this extension of the NIPEARS service.
- g) Be willing to participate in specific local SPPG /HSC Trust facilitated CPD relevant to the NIPEARS Plus service.

## **5.3 SERVICE TO BE PROVIDED**

Note: The service may only be provided by IP qualified optometrists or appropriately qualified doctors.

Contractors will ensure that, in the delivery of this enhanced service, individual practitioners providing the service will comply fully with all requirements to include:

- investigation and management, including treatment if required, of a patient referred to them with suspected Keratitis, Herpes Simplex, Foreign Body, Anterior Uveitis. \*\* refer to detailed inclusion/exclusion criteria in section 5.6 below.
- access to appointments for these patients within defined timescales in SPPG GOS approved locations.
- management of these patients in line with the agreed SPPG/HSC Trust protocols and the College of Optometrists Clinical Management Guidelines.
- liaison with secondary care BHSCT Eye Casualty clinicians on patient management as required.

- appropriate referral of patients, if required, following assessment and management, to secondary care, either urgently or routinely as required, in line with the agreed guidelines and pathways.
- involvement of patients in the management of their care.
- service to be provided throughout normal practice opening times or exceptionally, by prior arrangement.
- weekly submission of information on IP practitioner/practice availability to provide NIPEARS Plus, to SPPG who in turn will inform BHSC Eye Casualty.
- provision of feedback to the original optometry practice
- appropriate communication with other primary care staff e.g. GP's and Community Pharmacists, and with secondary care staff e.g. Eye Casualty, as required.

**Remote consultations** (assessments): In response to the COVID 19 pandemic the facility to provide Remote Consultations is included within the NIPEARS and NIPEARS Plus service, however it is most likely that these patients will require face to face assessment. If a remote consultation is to be provided it should be in line with the GOC joint regulatory statement on Remote Consultations: *click link*

[https://www.optical.org/filemanager/root/site\\_assets/publications/covid\\_19/High-level-principles-for-remote-prescribing\\_.pdf](https://www.optical.org/filemanager/root/site_assets/publications/covid_19/High-level-principles-for-remote-prescribing_.pdf)

and other supporting guidance from the College of Optometrists.

#### 5.4 PATIENT ELIGIBILITY - INCLUSION/ EXCLUSION CRITERIA

##### Patients INCLUDED in the Enhanced Service

- a) Patients must be registered with a General Medical Practitioner (GP) in Northern Ireland and therefore have a current Health and Care Number (HCN).

##### AND

For the purposes of the pilot the patients must be directed from BHSC Eye Casualty, or be referred internally within the same practice by another non-IP optometrist, or upgraded from NIPEARS by the IP optometrist. The patient must have presented with symptoms/signs suggestive of the specific conditions of

- **Foreign Body. Note: needles should not be used** see 5.8 below
- **Marginal Keratitis, excluding contact lens related keratitis**
- **Herpes Simplex Keratitis**
- **Anterior Uveitis, excluding anterior uveitis with hypopyon.**

- b) Patients may normally only access **one NI PEARS Plus assessment and two follow-ups per year.**

**Note:** In exceptional circumstances a patient may access a further NI PEARS Plus assessment and/or follow up within a year but this requires agreement with an SPPG optometric clinical adviser via BSO Ophthalmic Services in line with usual NIPEARS approval procedures.

**• Patients EXCLUDED from the NIPEARS Plus Enhanced Service**

- The following patients are **NOT** eligible for a NI PEARS Plus Assessment:
  - a) Ophthalmic conditions requiring immediate, urgent referral to HES. For example: acute trauma, chemical burn, orbital cellulitis etc... Patients with these ophthalmic conditions should be referred immediately without optometric NI PEARS Plus investigation and in line with Eye Casualty protocols.
  - b) Contact lens related keratitis
  - c) Patients already under the care of ophthalmology for their condition, other than recurrent anterior uveitis.
  - d) Children under 5 years old.
  - e) Patients with signs/symptoms suggestive of conditions other than the four specified conditions.

## REFERRAL INTO THE SERVICE

**Patients may access the NIPEARS Plus service by:**

- redirection from Belfast Trust Eye Casualty (EC) following referral to EC from another clinician e.g. optometrist or GP
- the IP optometrist/OMP having seen a patient under NIPEARS initially and identified them as having one of the four conditions. The IP optometrist may undertake to manage the patient and so step the patient into NIPEARS Plus. See section 7. below
- another non-IP optometrist within the same practice having seen a patient under NIPEARS initially and identified the patient as having one of the four conditions may refer to the IP optometrist/OMP within the practice to be seen under NIPEARS Plus.

## 5.5 ACCESSIBILITY

Contractors must be able to provide an appointment for an NI PEARS Plus assessment **within 48 hours** of an appointment being requested, unless it is for a follow up appointment. For urgent, potentially sight threatening, conditions the contractor should arrange for the patient to be seen on the same day or if this not possible, refer the patient directly to specialist ophthalmology services e.g. Eye Casualty.

If an accredited IP optometrist/OMP is unavailable the practice should have alternative arrangements in place and staff should be fully briefed to enable them to advise and redirect patients.

Contractors will be required to submit a weekly survey to SPPG Ophthalmic Services advising of the availability of the IP optometrist in the incoming week. SPPG will in turn inform BHSCT Eye Casualty.

Patients requiring a follow up appointment must attend for this within **8 weeks** of their initial NI PEARS Plus assessment.

## 5.5 PATIENT CONSENT

Patient consent for an NI PEARS Plus assessment is by informed consent. The provider IP Optometrist/ OMP must advise the patient as to the nature of the assessment which will be provided and the patient must sign the patient declaration on the Enhanced Services Patient Declaration (ESPR) form.

## 5.6 CLINICAL ASSESSMENT AND TREATMENT

- a) The clinical assessment and any treatment provided within the NI PEARS Plus Enhanced Services (ES) must only be carried out by an accredited NIPEARS IP Optometrist/OMP.
- b) The level of clinical investigation should be appropriate for the presenting signs and symptoms. All procedures are at the clinical discretion of the IP Optometrist/OMP providing the service.
- c) Clinical records: further information on record keeping is noted in 5.11 below.
- d) All patients must have access to clinically appropriate care in line with Clinical Management Guidelines of the College of Optometrists  
*click link [Clinical Management Guidelines](#)*

## 5.6 POTENTIAL OUTCOMES - Following NI PEARS IP Assessment

- a) Assessment, management, and treatment including follow up if required, aligned to the College of optometrists Clinical Management Guidelines. **A practitioner should be confident in their own level of clinical competency and experience when deciding to manage a particular**

**condition. If in doubt a patient should be referred for more specialist care using the appropriate referral pathway.**

- b) Assessment and triage for onward referral, either at first assessment or follow up, if management/treatment plan is not resolving the condition.

Practitioners should promote patient “self-help” where possible e.g. ocular hygiene, eye-safety for DIY, smoking cessation etc. Practitioners should have appropriate patient information leaflets to provide to their patients.

## **5.7 RECORD KEEPING and COMMUNICATION WITH REFERRERS and OTHER SERVICES**

- a) The contractor must ensure that they comply with current regulations in regard Data Protection currently in force.
- b) The contractor must ensure that clinical records kept of services provided under NI PEARS Plus are full, accurate and contemporaneous and they must be retained according to the peer accepted guidance (e.g. College of Optometrists “Guidance for Professional Practice”). The clinical record must be clearly annotated “NI PEARS Plus” or “NI PEARS Plus follow up” as appropriate.
- c) The contractor must ensure the “NI PEARS Plus Outcome & Claim form” is completed and submitted to the BSO for payment processing. The form must be completed fully and accurately as information on this form will be used both for payment and for data collection to form part of the monitoring, audit and further development of the service. The information on the claim form must accurately reflect the information on the patient clinical record.
- d) The contractor must comply with any reasonable request by the SPPG, or their representative, to view records of patients to whom NI PEARS Plus assessments have been provided for purposes of governance, probity or audit. Any such request must be complied with within the specified timeframe.
- e) Referrals: referrals of the patient to secondary care, other than to Eye Casualty, should be made by CCG e referral using the referral template applicable to the particular referral pathway. **Referrals to Eye Casualty for patients seen under NIPEARS Plus must be made by telephone.** CCG should not be used for these patients. GP referrals must currently be made manually on paper. Referral templates/letters should include a note that the patient was seen under NI PEARS Plus.
- f) Provider list: the contractor and the IP optometrist must agree to their practice being listed as an NI PEARS Plus provider practice and the practice contact details and IP optometrist name being made available to the BHSCT Eye Casualty service and the other practices participating in the pilot.
- g) Feedback to original referring practice: the optometrist providing NIPEARS Plus is requested, when discharging the patient, to formally hand their care

back to the original referring optometrist by informing them of the diagnosis and outcome for the patient.

All NIPEARS / NIPEARS Plus documentation is hosted on the BSO website.

## 5.8 FACILITIES / EQUIPMENT

The Contractor and provider optometrist/OMP must ensure that they have adequate equipment needed to provide this service including infection control procedures.

**Important Note: Foreign body removal must not involve the use of needles** i.e. cotton bud or similar, a golf spud or a birr only may be used as there is currently no facility within HSC occupational health for managing needle stick injuries for optometrist.

NI PEARS Plus assessments must only be provided in premises approved for GOS provision by SPPG.

## 5.9 CLINICAL GOVERNANCE

- a) The contractor must ensure and satisfy themselves that all individual practitioners providing the enhanced service:
  - i. Have a valid and current personal code for GOS in Northern Ireland.
  - ii. Comply with all relevant legislation and guidance and maintain GOC registration.
  - iii. Hold the Independent Prescriber qualification or be a registered Ophthalmic Medical Practitioner
  - iv. Fulfil the criteria for eligibility to provide the enhanced service
  - v. Have signed the Individual Practitioner Enhanced Service Agreement.
- b) The contractor must sign an annual enhanced service agreement and will be required to provide annual assurances in respect of the enhanced service provision.
- c) The contractor should ensure that the optometrist is aware of his/her own limitations and ensure that they do not compromise patient safety at any time. All clinical procedures must be carried out within the competencies of the Optometrist/OMP.
- d) The contractor shall ensure that full, accurate and contemporaneous records are maintained by the IP optometrist/OMP of all patient contacts, clearly indicating on the record that it is a NI PEARS Plus assessment/follow-up. See section 6.9.
- e) The contractor shall ensure that appropriate risk management, including safe-disposal, infection control and health and safety procedures are in place.



- f) The contractor must ensure that appropriate standards for the prevention and control of infection are in place. This will include:
- providing a clean, safe environment and appropriate hand washing facilities in line with College of Optometrist Guidelines (<http://www.college-optometrists.org/en/utilities/document-summary.cfm/docid/EBEDBDAB-AD05-404C-8850B2E9D5A2EE37>)
  - agreeing to undertake infection prevention audits as required
  - ensuring all staff are aware of infection prevention and control guidance
- g) The contractor shall ensure that appropriate systems are in place to report Adverse Incidents/ Serious Adverse Incidents in line with SPPG requirements for such reporting.

## 6. FEE LEVELS

The current fee levels for providing an NI PEARS IP assessment to patients within the pilot are:

- NIPEARS IP assessment: £90
- NIPEARS follow up: £20

Note: if the patient self refers for NIPEARS i.e. has not been redirected from Eye Casualty, and the IP optometrist/OMP commences the assessment under NIPEARS but findings are suggestive of one of the four specified conditions the patient may be stepped up to NIPEARS Plus for management of the condition and the NIPEARS fee of £40 topped up by £50 to the full NIPEARS Plus fee and claimed as such. An NIPEARS fee of £40 plus a full NIPEARS Plus fee of £90 cannot both be claimed for a patient seen solely by the IP optometrist/OMP.

**Note: the NIPEARS Plus fee may only be claimed for patients who have been assessed as having one of the four specified conditions and managed accordingly. It cannot be claimed for management of any other acute condition; these conditions must be managed within the core NIPEARS service.**

**Reminder:** A fee can normally only be claimed for one NI PEARS Plus assessment and up to two follow-ups as required, per patient per year. In exceptional circumstances a further NI PEARS Plus assessment/follow up may be provided, and claimed for, within a year but this requires agreement with an SSPG Optometric Clinical Adviser in line with procedures.

## 7. VERIFICATION

The provision of this enhanced service, NI PEARS Plus, will be subject to the usual monitoring and probity post payment verification checks provided by Business Services Organisation Probity Service.

## **8. PAYMENT PROCESS**

These claims are made by submission of an “NI PEARS Plus Outcome & Claim Form” by email to BSO Ophthalmic services. (see example of form in Appendix 1) A separate claim form must be completed and submitted for each patient seen under this Enhanced Service and for each attendance i.e. a separate claim form must be submitted for a first assessment and for a follow up, if follow up is required.

A **patient declaration form, ESPR**, must be signed by both the patient and the providing optometrist for each NI PEARS Plus service provision.

## **9. DATA REPORTING REQUIREMENTS AND AUDIT**

Contractors should ensure that data on individual patients for which claims are made is recorded and held at practice level and, if requested by the SPPG, should be provided in the requested format. This information will be used to evaluate and this Enhanced Service pilot and inform future development.

The service will be audited to ensure it meets its aims and to inform further development. For audit purposes Contractors are required to include the requested clinical information on the NI Pears Plus Outcome and Claim form for each patient examined under NI PEARS Plus. The Contractor must supply the SPPG with such information as it may reasonably request for the purposes of monitoring the contractor’s performance of its obligations under this NI Enhanced Service.

Please refer to more guidance under the ‘Record Keeping and Communications with Referrers’ section of this document.

## **10. PATIENT EXPERIENCE & ENGAGEMENT**

Contractors will be expected to provide an annual report to the SPPG on all complaints and compliments received regarding the service and the lessons learnt where necessary. Contractors will be required to cooperate, when required, with the SPPG in requests to undertake an assessment of patient experience of the service which may include issuing evaluation questionnaires to patients.

## **11. TERMINATION/SERVICE WITHDRAWAL**

The SPPG reserves the right to:

- a) Terminate the provision of the enhanced service by a contractor who does not comply with the service specification in force at the time of service provision
- b) Withdraw accreditation of an individual practitioner who does not fulfill the eligibility criteria in force at the time of service provision.
- c) A contractor who is unable to provide the service in line with the service specification and supporting service protocols and guidance should notify SPPG Ophthalmic Services at the earliest opportunity and in line with guidance noted in the service protocol. Any Contractor or individual IP Optometrist/ OMP who wishes to withdraw entirely from the Enhanced Service must notify the SPPG in writing of their intention to do so giving 14 days' notice. The SPPG may also withdraw provision of this Enhanced Service giving 14 days' notice, except where service provision or patient safety is compromised in which case the SPPG may withdraw the service immediately from a Contractor or an individual IP Optometrist / OMP.

**To access all NIPEARS related documentation and claim forms:**

**Click on link: [Local Enhanced Services \(LES\)](#)**

## **APPENDICES**

APPENDIX 1: NI PEARS Plus Claim Form

APPENDIX 2: NI PEARS Plus Template Feedback Report to Patient's Original Optometrist

## Sample of Claim Form

## APPENDIX 1

## NI PEARS PLUS PILOT OUTCOME & CLAIM FORM

Patient Details	Optometric Practice Details
Name:	NI PEARS Plus IP Optometrist:
DOB:	Personal Code:
Health and Care Number:	Practice Name:
	Practice Code:
<b>Referral Source</b> (please tick)	BHSCT Eye Casualty <input type="checkbox"/> Name of original optometry/GP practice who referred patient to Eye Casualty if known _____  NIPEARS optometrist in same practice <input type="checkbox"/> NIPPlus IP optometrist (upgrade from NIPEARS provided by same IP practitioner) <input type="checkbox"/> _____
<b>NI PEARS Plus Activity</b> (please tick)	Date of Referral: _____ Appointment Date: _____ First appointment <input type="checkbox"/> Follow up appointment <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Diagnosis</b> (please tick/specify)	Foreign Body <input type="checkbox"/> Anterior Uveitis: First episode <input type="checkbox"/> Recurrent episode <input type="checkbox"/> Herpes simplex Ulcer <input type="checkbox"/> Marginal keratitis <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please specify) _____
<b>Outcome of NI PEARS Plus Attendance</b> (please select all that apply)	Discharge with advice <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Or</b> Manage and Treat <input type="checkbox"/> If foreign body removal state method _____ Ophthalmic Medication recommended Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Prescription Issued Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> If yes indicate type: Lubricant <input type="checkbox"/> Chloramphenicol <input type="checkbox"/> Other topical POM antibiotic <input type="checkbox"/> Oral antibiotic <input type="checkbox"/> Topical Steroid <input type="checkbox"/> Topical Cycloplegic <input type="checkbox"/> Topical anti-viral <input type="checkbox"/> Oral Anti- viral <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please state) <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ BHSCT Eye Casualty referral required Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> If yes reason for referral _____
<b>Patient &amp; Practitioner Declaration</b>	Complete LESPR form; use code NIPP A (if First Attendance) NIPP F (if Follow Up)

<b>NI PEARS PLUS PILOT REFERRAL REPORT</b>
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Patient Details	NIPEARS Plus Practice Details
Name:	NI PEARS Plus Practitioner:
DOB:	Practice Name:
HCN:	Date:

### REFERRAL OUTCOME INFORMATION

Dear Practitioner

Your patient was directed from Belfast Trust Eye Casualty to the NI PEARS Plus Pilot Service.

I carried out the assessment and he/she has been diagnosed with:

Foreign Body  Herpes Simplex Keratitis  Marginal Keratitis  Anterior Uveitis

Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

I have:

Provided Advice & Discharged

Provided Management, Treatment & Discharged

Referred patient to secondary care Urgent  Routine

Hospital/Dept \_\_\_\_\_

Comments (as needed) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I have advised the patient to return to you, as their usual practice, for their ongoing routine eyecare.

Yours sincerely

\_\_\_\_\_

NI PEARS Plus Pilot Practitioner

