

Primary Care Optometry Acute Eyecare Pathway NIPEARS Plus Pilot Protocols and Guidance

March 2023

The NIPEARS Plus Pilot service is an expansion of the NIPEARS service which will enable optometrists qualified as independent prescribers or OMPs to investigate and manage patients with specific acute eye conditions who would otherwise be managed within the secondary care eye casualty service. The pilot service will be provided by practices with an IP or OMP practitioner within the Belfast Trust Eye Casualty catchment area.

Service provision

The service is required to be provided only during weekdays (i.e. Monday to Friday) not at weekends and only on days when the IP optometrist or OMP is available in the practice.

Provider Contact Information

Contractors are required to provide: practice name, address, contact telephone number, name of the IP optometrist (s) providing the service to SPPG Ophthalmic services.

SPPG Ophthalmic Services will provide the list to Belfast Trust Eye Casualty and the other practices taking part in the pilot.

Belfast Trust Eye Casualty will provide patients that they are directing to the service with the contact details of practices within the patient's locality.

Weekly survey: contractors are required to submit a weekly survey advising of the days that the IP optometrist(s)/OMP will be available in the practice during the following week i.e. the days that a patient may be directed to the practice.

SPPG Ophthalmic Services will issue an email with a link to the survey each Monday to be submitted by the Thursday of that week.

Identification of patients

1. Patients directed from Belfast Eye Casualty.

A patient referred to Belfast Eye Casualty (EC) with signs/symptoms of one of the four specified conditions (see point xx below) will be triaged by EC. If identified as appropriate for NIPEARS Plus the patient will be advised to contact one of the pilot practices in their area and request an NIPEARS Plus appointment.

It is the patient's responsibility to arrange the appointment with the practice.

2. **Patients seen within the practice by the IP optometrist under NIPEARS** and identified with one of the 4 specified conditions may be stepped into NIPEARS Plus for management.
3. **Patients seen within the practice by another practitioner under NIPEARS**, identified with one of the 4 specified conditions who would otherwise be referred to Eye Casualty may be referred internally within the practice to the IP optometrist/OMP providing NIPEARS Plus.

Note: no inter practice referrals will take place i.e. no direct referrals from another practice can be accepted by the NIPEARS Plus practice during the pilot.

Clinical Management of Patients

The patient should be investigated and managed by the IP optometrist/OMP in line with the College of Optometrists Clinical Management Guidelines.

If advice is needed on managing the patient the practitioner should contact an Eye Casualty clinician using the clinical advice line tel:028 96150093.

If referral to Eye Casualty is required for a patient seen under NIPEARS Plus this should be done using the clinical advice line. CCG **should not** be used to refer a patient seen under NIPEARS Plus to Eye Casualty.

INCLUSIONS/EXCLUSIONS CRITERIA

INCLUSIONS: Conditions for acceptance to NIPEARS Plus

Patients with signs/symptoms of:

- **Foreign body** note: **needles should not be used for removal**
- **Marginal Keratitis, excluding** contact lens related keratitis
- **Herpes Simplex Keratitis, excluding** contact lens wearers as acanthamoeba can present with a dendritic type lesion in early stages
- **Unilateral anterior uveitis, excluding** patient with bilateral or posterior uveitis or hypopyon.

EXCLUSIONS: Patients that cannot be seen under NIPEARS Plus

Patients with suspected conditions other than those listed above including:

- Contact lens patient presenting with either marginal or herpetic keratitis; these patients will be retained in Eye Casualty or if presenting in the practice must be referred to Eye Casualty.
- Patient with anterior uveitis with hypopyon or with posterior uveitis

Exclusions contd:

- Patient within 6 weeks of ocular surgery
- Patients already under the care of ophthalmology for their condition, other than recurrent anterior uveitis.
- Patients with signs/symptoms suggestive of conditions other than the four specified conditions
- Children under 5 years.
- Patients within the exclusion criteria will be retained for management in eye Casualty. If identified in the NIPEARS Plus provider practice they should be referred to Eye Casualty.

Discharge of the Patient

On completion of the management/treatment the patient should be discharged with advice to return to their usual optometrist for ongoing routine eyecare as required.

A report should be given to the patient to take back to their usual optometrist detailing the condition, treatment and outcome using the *click link* [NIPEARS Plus Report Template](#).

Advise the patient that as this is a pilot they may be asked to complete a short survey on their experiences at a later stage.

The patients should also be encouraged to bring any comments or concerns they may have directly to the practice or if they prefer they may provide comment to SPPG at HSCcommunications@hscni.net.

Clinical governance

Patient clinical record should be titled NIPEARS Plus (NIPP) or NIPEARS Plus Follow up (NIPPF)

Full, accurate and contemporaneous records must be maintained, including details of the treatment and outcome, in line with GOC standards for record keeping.

Claim process

Patient declaration: the patient and practitioner must sign an Enhanced Service Patient Declaration form (ESPR) and the code NIPP (if first assessment) or NIPPF (if follow up) should be included under service type.

As this is a pilot the claim for the service must be made using the paper claim form *click link* [NIPEARS Plus Outcome and Claim form](#).

The clinical information requested on the form is to inform evaluation of the service and should be completed accurately.

Completed claim forms should be emailed to Gareth Drake in BSO Ophthalmic services at gareth.drake@hscni.net.

Claims should be submitted within 3 months of, but ideally as soon as possible after, service provision.

Payment will appear on the payment schedule under Adjustments.

Pilot Evaluation

Data will be gathered from the claim forms and from Belfast Eye Casualty.

Surveys may be issued to participating practices during the pilot to evaluate contractor and practitioner experiences and to patients.

The pilot will run for approx. 20 weeks after which the service may have to be suspended while full evaluation takes place. If the outcome is positive indicating regional roll out a further funding source will have to be identified before the service can resume.

Professional Conduct

Contractors and practitioners providing the service should ensure as far as possible that the patient understands that the NIPEARS Plus service is not part of their routine eyecare which they receive from the practice they usually attend. Every effort should be made to encourage the patient to return to their original optometrist on completion of their NIPEARS Plus service.

Further information.

For service delivery queries please email ophthalmic.services@hscni.net

For clinical queries relating to a specific case please contact Belfast Eye Casualty
tel: 02896150093

[NIPEARS Plus Service Specification](#)

[College of Optometrists Clinical Management Guidelines](#)