



OPHTHALMIC SERVICES NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2023

Welcome to this, the Spring 2023 edition of HSC Ophthalmic Services Newsletter.

As we enter the new financial year, service and budget pressures across all of HSC, including eyecare, are more acute than ever. All parts of our system will be required to integrate better, orientating services to deliver care as efficiently as possible and in the most appropriate setting.

HSC Ophthalmic Services has a strong track record of innovation and transformation, working together to manage patients appropriately. In this issue, you will read about a new initiative in the acute eye pathway (NI PEARS PLUS), an award-winning OHT Review and Monitoring Service, and the current PHA Living Well Campaign “Look after your Eyes” which complements an RNIB-partnered social media campaign #EyeCareWeCare. Both these initiatives raise awareness, among other things, around the importance of routine eye examinations to both help people see, and around prevention and early intervention.

There is also important information about the new Diabetic Eye Screening Programme Low Risk Pathway. We hope the information will help you have an informed discussion with patients who are living with diabetes, encouraging uptake of screening, and managing expectations around the recall cycle.

We also feature local optometrist Matthew McClean making an amateur debut at The Masters and we wish him every success and enjoyment in the prestigious event.

Finally, SPPG would like to thank you for your continued hard work and commitment to patients and society.

Happy Easter.

Raymond Curran

Head of Ophthalmic Services, SPPG.

Annual Optometry Quality Assurance Returns (22/23)

Annually all Ophthalmic contractors are requested to submit their quality assurance (QA) return and once again this process will commence in the incoming weeks. Contractor practices are supported in the completion of this return through the annual practice allowance which is paid to practices following submission of their completed QA return.



In early April, ophthalmic services will issue the QA returns (survey format) to all practices with information on final submission date. Your support completing the practice QA return is appreciated.

HSC Optometry Portal

If an optometry contractor practice is experiencing issues with their connection to the Optometry Portal, the staff in the eBusiness team will be happy to take a call from you to discuss the problems or issues you are facing. Please remember that the eBusiness team cannot deal with queries about the specific applications which are hosted on the portal (e.g. NIECR, CCG, Interpreting Service, vFire etc...) but they will be able to help with portal connection problems. The eBusiness team can be contacted on eBusiness@hscni.net.

CCG eReferral System and Browser Settings

Contractor practices have been advised of current problems in relation to CCG and internet browser compatibility. The CCG system is configured for use with the Internet Explorer (IE) browser and the withdrawal of support for IE has meant that practice computers must now use the newer browser 'Edge' to operate CCG with an adjustment made to the settings on the Edge browser to enable CCG to launch. The CCG system is an IT application owned by National Services Scotland and as such BSO IT staff do not have the ability to undertake the necessary IT work to change the CCG system's current dependency on IE.

BSO have developed a guide for optometry contractor practices to help them in the reconfiguration of the settings on Edge. Unfortunately, as there can be a frequent release of updates for the operating systems, it can mean that the change to the settings needs to be actioned on a regular basis. Please read the guidance at the following page of the BSO website: [BSO Optometry Portal \(hscni.net\)](https://www.hscni.net/BSO-Optometry-Portal)

Ophthalmic services in SPPG have raised concerns with BSO IT colleagues about the challenges this technical problem is causing for optometrists in the course of their work and in delivery of clinical care. Should the situation arise where an optometrist cannot use the CCG system because of this technical problem and a referral must be sent by paper, please [follow the guidance](#) at the following link to ensure that the paper referral is processed **by the patient's GP practice**: [Ophthalmic Service Guidance for Paper Referrals March 2023 \(hscni.net\)](#)

All paper referral templates are hosted on the following page: [Optometry Referral Information \(hscni.net\)](https://www.hscni.net/optometry-referral-information)

SPPG Ophthalmic staff fully appreciate the frustrations many are experiencing because of this CCG/browser issue and ophthalmic services are in the process of securing additional IT / technical assistance to help contractors. Your patience is greatly appreciated whilst work is progressed by IT colleagues in BSO to help resolve the current problem.

vFire online portal for user account password resets

Practices are reminded of the process for requesting password resets for CCG, NIECR and HSCNI email accounts. All contractor practices that are connected to the HSC Optometry Portal (= 263/270 practices) have access to the online portal (known as “vFire”) for submitting requests for password resets for accounts. Guidance on the use of the vFire portal was issued to all practices that are connected to the Portal in November ‘22. Using vFire affords a more direct route for CCG and NIECR and practice HSCNI email account password resets, and avoids the need to log a call or send an email to request a password reset.



Please read the information hosted on the HSC Optometry Portal at the link “vFire Customer Portal” prior to using vFire. It is essential that you follow the guidance to ensure your request is directed to the correct team in BSO IT services.

Interpreting Services Update

Optometry contractor practices have access to a range of interpreting services and you are encouraged to utilise these services when dealing with patients / clients who have specific language or communication considerations. Use of an Interpreting Service helps to ensure:



- ✓ accurate and impartial communication between patients/clients and Health Care Practitioners
- ✓ that the risks of misdiagnosis and misunderstanding are minimised
- ✓ confidentiality and respect for the dignity of service users
- ✓ that Health Care Practitioners can provide a responsive and efficient service
- ✓ compliance with legislative requirements

Face-to-Face Interpreting

The NI HSC Interpreting Service (NIHSCIS) offers a spoken language interpreting service with the aim being to improve access to Health and Social Care for Patients who do not speak English as a first or competent second language. This face-to-face interpreting service provides trained interpreters working to agreed Terms of Engagement and confidentiality arrangements in the discharge of their service.

Currently 36 different languages are catered for by the service and the service is provided free-of-charge to patients who are eligible for HSC services*, including General Ophthalmic Services and commissioned Optometry Enhanced Services.

**Please note the BSO Interpreting Service does NOT provide Interpreters for private patients/appointments.*

Telephone Interpreting

The Big Word telephone interpreting service is available to all optometry practices and offers 24/7 access interpreting for a large number of languages. The Big Word is a simple service to arrange and is available on demand, as required. You are encouraged to avail of this service, particularly in the scenario where face-to-face interpretation may not be available (e.g. interpreter availability, language not availability)

Sign Language Interpreting

A new face-o-face sign language interpreting service launched at the start of April. Further information will be provided to contractor practices in the incoming weeks. The new service will provide face to face **and** remote sign language interpreting services for people who are deaf and provide a full range of communication supports for people who are deafblind and hard of hearing attending health and social care appointments. All this will be delivered through one booking service. Approximately 8,000 people use sign language in Northern Ireland - approximately 5,000 British Sign Language (BSL) users and 2,000-3,000 Irish Sign Language (ISL) users.

Currently sign language interpreting services are accessed and provided differently in each Health and Social Care Trust area. This means that there are differences in how interpreters are booked.

The new provider – Sign Language Interactions – will work closely with the Department of Health to provide a full range of communication supports for people who are Deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing.

Diabetic Eye Screening – Implementation of a Low Risk Pathway

The Northern Ireland Diabetic Eye Screening Programme will be implementing a new Low Risk Pathway (LRP) from April 2023. This pathway will enable the programme to meet the [National Screening Committee's recommendation](#) that those who are at low risk of sight loss should be screened every two years rather than annually. There are strict eligibility criteria which participants must meet before being moved to the LRP and only participants in the Routine Digital Screening pathway will be eligible.

The new pathway will be implemented via a phased approach to even out demand on the service. Approximately half of those who attend their routine screening appointment in 2023/24 will be allocated to the LRP, upon confirmation of a negative result.

The remaining 50% will be moved to the LRP during 2024/25, provided their results remain negative for retinopathy and maculopathy. Participants will be informed of their move to the Low Risk Pathway via their results letter, which will be accompanied by an information leaflet, answering key questions about the change. Further information on this change will be available on the PHA website from April 2023.

Adverse Incidents – Helpful Learning for all Practitioners

Ophthalmic Services would like to share with you the learning and take-home points from two recently reported Adverse Incidents (AI) from optometry practices



1. An AI was reported in recent months from an optometry practice. The incident involved a patient who experienced a seizure following exposure to the light of the probe from an iCare Tonometer. The patient was a child whose mum had concerns about lights triggering seizures and the episode in the consulting room demonstrated this as a real possible cause. The patient recovered well whilst in the room with the optometrist and appropriate information was shared with the patient's GP.
**** This incident demonstrates the importance of considering possible triggers for epilepsy for a patient when having an eye examination****
2. An AI was reported in early 2023 from a practice where it was discovered that the optometrist had referred a wrong patient, with the patient who had been referred residing in a different part of Northern Ireland. The error occurred because the patient was initially registered in the practice with an incorrect spelling of his first name which was not checked at all later visits. This meant the wrong HCN was found when the practice searched on the system (OCS and CCG) and it was saved on the patient's record. The error was noted when the patient returned to the practice and the correct first name spelling, the referral had therefore been delayed by approx. 8-10 weeks. Contact was made with the Trust and the referral for the wrong patient deleted (as it needed to be removed from NIECR) and a new referral for the correct patient was generated and submitted.
**** This incident demonstrates the importance of validating the full and correct name, DOB and address for all patients prior to submitting claims for services and generating referrals****

Information on the process for reporting/submission of an Adverse Incident is available at the following link [Adverse Incident Reporting \(hscni.net\)](https://www.hscni.net/adverse-incident-reporting).

Award for the Ocular Hypertension Review & Monitoring Service



Belfast Trust celebrate success at the Chairman's Award Event, February 2023

In the last [Newsletter -December 2022](#)) you will have read about the OHT Review and Monitoring Service and the recent update to the service specification. Ophthalmics Services wish to congratulate the Belfast HSC Trust glaucoma service and the community Optometrists who are involved in providing the service on their success in being awarded 1st Place in the Belfast Trust Chairman's Award (community innovation category). The service requires a significant

level of clinical and administrative input, management and oversight and thanks are extended to everyone who has worked hard to make the service both successful and sustainable. You can read more about the Award for the OHT service and the other categories of winners, plus view pictures of the occasion on the Belfast Trust website

[Chairman's Awards 2023 | Belfast Health & Social Care Trust \(hscni.net\)](#)

SPPG Clinical Adviser Margaret McMullan also deserves special mention and recognition for her support, oversight and planning associated with this innovative and ground-breaking initiative.

Reminder of NICE Guideline 81

Optometrists are reminded of the importance of the application of [NICE Guideline 81](#) in their clinical assessment and decision making for patients with suspect Ocular Hypertension (OHT) or suspect Glaucoma. [NG81](#) sets out clearly the expectations in terms of what assessments need to be undertaken in primary care and what actions are required when those assessments result in clinical observations which place a patient into the category of being "suspect" for OHT or glaucoma.

All optometrists working in primary care practice are asked to ensure that they are familiar with NG81 and the detail of it in relation to patient clinical assessment and management.

Please read the guidance hosted at the following link: [Overview | Glaucoma: diagnosis and management | Guidance | NICE](#)

Acute Eyecare Pathway

1. Eye Casualty Referrals

All practices who refer patients to Belfast Trust Eye Casualty should now have received guidance on the use of CCG for Belfast Eye Casualty referrals: please do check your HSC email account.

CCG should be used for referral of urgent patients. It should not be used for patients with an emergency, who need seen immediately, or for patients where you are unsure if they need to be seen in Eye Casualty. For both these groups of patients contact Belfast Eye Casualty using the clinical advice line as usual tel: 02896510093.

Important reminder: CCG referral is only to be used during Belfast Eye Casualty weekday opening hours i.e. Monday – Friday 9am – 5pm. It must not be used outside these times and not at all at weekends or during public holidays; when referrals must be made by phone as usual otherwise there is a risk of delay in triage of the patient when there is no CCG triage cover.

If a referral is made via phone, a follow up CCG referral is not required; instead the patient should be given the paper referral letter.

i.e. referral should be made either by CCG if within the appropriate hours, or by telephone but not both.

Referrals to the Western Trust/Altnagelvin Eye Casualty should continue to be made by telephone as CCG referral to Eye Casualty is not yet available for Altnagelvin.

All Referral information can be found at *click link* [Optometry Referral Information](#).

2. NIPEARS Review

The NIPEARS service has been established regionally for 5 years and accessible in the vast majority of practices. A review of the service is currently being undertaken by the Ophthalmic Services team. We would like to hear your views on the current service provision, any issues and challenges and suggestions for future developments. A survey will be issued to all contractors shortly and we would encourage all practitioners to complete it to help inform the review and changes that may be needed.

3. NIPEARS Plus Pilot

A pilot to test an extension of NIPEARS has just commenced. This pilot involves some patients who have been referred to Belfast Trust eye Casualty suspected of having four specific conditions including marginal keratitis, herpes simplex keratitis, foreign body and anterior uveitis. They are being redirected to a primary care IP optometrist or OMP for management to completion in primary care.

This is an exciting step forward in optometry involvement in the acute eyecare pathway which aims to make use of the specific skills of the IP optometrists to enable more patients to be managed in primary care, closer to home.

Practices with an IP optometrist or OMP who are within the Belfast Trust Eye Casualty referral catchment area have been invited to take part in the pilot and we are very grateful to those practices and practitioners who have agreed to take part.

If you are a contractor with an IP optometrist or OMP in your practice and you have not received an invitation but feel that the majority of your Eye Casualty referrals are to Belfast Trust Eye Casualty rather than the Western Trust/Altnagelvin please email ophthalmic.services@hscni.net.

You may have a patient that you have seen under NIPEARS and referred to Eye Casualty who will subsequently be redirected to a practice participating in the pilot. On completion of their treatment the patient will be directed back to your practice for their ongoing routine eye care and the patient should bring a report from the IP optometrist.

CPD

We are now in the second year of the new CPD system so everyone should be familiar with claiming their own points and reflecting on the learning. SPPG and BSO organise and run CPD around the needs of the service and in response to requests from practitioners. Feedback is essential so please remember to complete the feedback at the end of each session. It is hard to try and please everyone with regard dates and timings etc. but SPPG try and ensure they offer as much flexibility as possible.

Speakers cannot always be flexible due to their other commitments, so to a large extent that dictates the timetable. The CPD grant can also be a useful asset if you need to take time out of practice to attend a session allowing locum staff to be employed. Notwithstanding all these challenges the sessions continue to be extremely popular with over 250 registrants attending most. Hopefully you will continue to enjoy them and get both learning as well as CPD points from them.

Please see the next upcoming sessions and the links to book. Ensure you alert all in your practice to the training opportunities below.

1) Tuesday 30th May 2023 6.00pm -7.15pm

“OCT – What does this picture mean” – 1CPD point

Ms Rachel Thomas – Lead Optometrist - Moorfields Eye Hospital London

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/8259928701496978011>



2) Monday 12th June 2023 6.30pm- 7.45pm

“Uveitis – What to know and do” - 1CPD/ IP Speciality CPD point available

Ms M Compton – Specialist Nurse Practitioner and Uveitis Specialist Nurse

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/4128274065932215893>

NI Formulary Chapter 11 - Revision

The aim of the Northern Ireland Formulary is to support the provision of safe, clinically effective and cost-effective medications. It is intended to be used across both primary and secondary care in Northern Ireland to ensure consistency and continuity of supply to the benefit of patients that require medications.

Please note Chapter 11 Eye (covering Dry Eye and Glaucoma) of the NI Formulary has been reviewed and updated, see **Chapter 11** for the full information or the **chapter summary sheet** for an overview of formulary choices. Please review the revised document before advising drops for your patients. [Chapter 11 Eye \(covering Dry Eye and Glaucoma\) updated | NI Formulary \(hscni.net\)](#). As you know there are a vast array of dry eye products available at a wide range of costs. The dry eye section is a bit different in terms of formulary choices in that it states e.g. **Sodium hyaluronate eye drops preservative free** and then giving *Eyeaze* as an example of a cost-effective product, please use this guidance when recommending treatments. It also contains some useful information regarding advice to patients which you may find beneficial. A link to this chapter is also available from the BSO Optometry pages if you are in practice and don't have access via the intranet.

Falls Care Pathway (Strength and Balance Programme) –

Reminder of referral pathway for Falls Service

The Belfast Integrated Care Partnership (ICP) Falls pathway 'Strength and Balance Programme' was highlighted recently on BBC Northern Ireland. This 12-week programme offers people who have had a fall or who have been identified as at risk of falling, to address both physical and mental factors which contribute to falls. Optometrists will be very aware of the link between vision and falls and are reminded of the falls pathway and how to refer patients to this care pathway. Please read the recent media coverage on the service and listen to the associated interview:

READ: [Belfast fall-prevention classes 'heaven sent' for over 65s - BBC News](#)

LISTEN (@1hr 18mins in):

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m001jt77?partner=uk.co.bbc&origin=share-mobile>.

For information on the Belfast Trust Falls Pathway please visit the following webpage: [Falls and Vision- Resources \(hscni.net\)](#)

PHA Living Well- Look after Your Eyes - Campaign

A health promotion campaign promoting the importance of eyecare involving community pharmacies is taking place during April and May. Community pharmacies across Northern Ireland have information and literature that they will be sharing with the public. The information can be viewed at the following link.

[Living Well \(hscni.net\)](http://LivingWell(hscni.net))

The PHA website is also hosting information for the public on eyecare which can be accessed at:

www.pha.site/living-well

We support and congratulate our community pharmacy colleagues on this initiative which should further develop supportive links between primary care optometry and community pharmacy as we work together to inform our patients and promote eye health care.

Invitation to Assist in Research – Ulster University

Dr Pdraig Mulholland from Ulster University is extending an invitation to optometrists who work either wholly or partly in primary care settings in Northern Ireland (or London) regions to complete a questionnaire on research activity.



Research is central to the implementation of evidence-based optometric practice. In this questionnaire will directly interrogate research activity, training, and attitudes to research amongst primary care optometrists in two different UK regions (Northern Ireland & North Thames Local Clinical Research Network areas [LCRNs]). The study hopes to identify what clinical equipment and infrastructure (e.g., IT systems) that clinicians have access to such that the capacity for the delivery of clinical research in your region may be evaluated. This is important given changes in the delivery of eyecare services, the evolving role of optometrists, and the need for increased research capacity in primary care eyecare settings.

The outcomes of this work will provide a complete overview of research activity within primary care settings in your region and guide the development of future initiatives to boost research capacity amongst primary care optometrists. If you would like to take this questionnaire it may be accessed at: <https://redcap.link/rng9zcyj> The form contains a mixture of tick-boxes and short answer questions with it taking approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. All responses will be anonymous. There is also an opportunity for interested clinicians to provide a contact email address such that you may be contacted about future opportunities to undertake research training or be involved in research delivery in your local area.

Note: Ethical approval for this questionnaire has been given by the School of Biomedical Sciences Ethics Filter Committee within Ulster University (reference FCBMS-23-003).

Thank you for your support for this survey, if you have any queries please contact Ulster University in the first instance (p.mulholland@ulster.ac.uk)

The Masters: Good Luck to Matthew McClean



Ophthalmic Services would like to take this opportunity to wish Irish amateur international golfer Matthew McClean, an optometrist from Belfast, the very best for his debut at The Masters in Augusta this week. Matthew secured his position in the tournament and also the US Open being held 15-18 June by winning the US Mid-

Amateur last September.

Matthew is a member of Malone Golf Club and will join Rory McIlroy, Seamus Power and Shane Lowry as Irish representatives in the field.

You can read about Matthew and his journey to Augusta at the following link: [Matthew McClean: Northern Ireland golfer and optometrist excited for Masters debut - BBC Sport](#)

Good luck Matthew !!

Ophthalmic Information and Support

If you have a query you can obtain information and guidance from the following:



1. SPPG, DoH Ophthalmic Services: ophthalmic.services@hscni.net
2. General Optical Council: [News | GeneralOpticalCouncil](#)
3. College of Optometrists: [Home - College of Optometrists \(college-optometrists.org\)](#)
4. For **Optometry Portal Connectivity** Issues: eBusiness@hscni.net
5. For Access to **vFire Customer Portal**: Please connect via the link on the Optometry Portal home page.