



OPHTHALMIC SERVICES NEWSLETTER

December 2022

As we approach the end of the end of 2022 Ophthalmic Services, SPPG, would like to thank you all for your dedication throughout this year in continuing to sustain and improve eyecare services for your patients. The challenges that prevail across health and social care are well versed and the provision of ophthalmic services is not exempt from these challenges and pressures; however, it is essential that, as we enter 2023, the work to further develop primary care optometry and secondary care ophthalmology services continues.

Working together with you as contractors, Optometry Northern Ireland, the NI Eyecare Network, the HSC Trusts, Departmental policy colleagues, the College of Optometrists, the General Optical Council, RNIB and other community and voluntary partners, we can continue to strive for service improvement and transformation optimising primary care eyecare services for whole system benefit. As work progresses on the development and implementation of the NI Integrated Care System it is vital that eye care services are front and centre of our work to integrate care and establish firm foundations in early detection and prevention of sight loss in our society.



Access to Acute Eyecare Services: Christmas and New Year Period

As patients increasingly use their local optometry practice as their first point of contact if they have an acute, sudden onset, eye problem it is very important that the patients know what to do if the practice is closed. All practices should ensure that they have clear, straightforward information for patients on the practice opening times during the holiday period and how the patient may access emergency care if they have an urgent eye problem that cannot wait.



You are advised to have a message on your practice telephone and on your practice website, Facebook® page or other social media platform that your practice may use.

The message should be clear giving information on the practice opening hours and state that **if the practice is closed and the patient has a very urgent problem that cannot wait, they should contact their nearest hospital Emergency Department.**

If your practice is to be closed for longer than the public holiday period you may wish to consider a “buddy” arrangement with another practice for managing your patients with acute eye problems

Please take time to consider the above and ensure that you have a clear and concise advice message for patients when they contact your practice when it is closed. Please ensure that you ‘test’ the message prior to activating it.

Access to Eye Casualty Services during the holiday period

BHSCT Eye Casualty Service (RVH)	
Day	Opening hours
Christmas Eve	Closes 1pm
Christmas Day	Closed all day
Boxing Day	Closes 1pm
Tuesday 27 th Dec	Closes 1pm
Weds 28 th – Fri 30 th	Normal opening hours
Sat 31 st Jan	Closes 1pm
Sun 1 st Jan	Closes 1pm
Mon 2 nd Jan	Closes 1pm
Tues 3 rd onwards	Normal hours resumed

NOTE: When BHSCT Eye Casualty is closed, as usual, telephone the RVH switchboard Tel: 028 90240450 and ask for the ophthalmologist on call.

WHSCT Eye Casualty Services (Altnagelvin)

For all urgent/emergency referrals phone the Altnagelvin Hospital switchboard as usual Tel: 028 71345171 and ask for the ophthalmologist on call.



Reminder: no walk-in patients are accepted in either BHSCT or WHSCT Eye Casualty, all patients must have an appointment arranged by their optometrist, GP or the main ED/ Urgent Care Centre if they attend there.

BHSCT Eye Casualty: CCG Referral Pilot

The CCG referral pilot has now been extended to include all practices in the Belfast and South Eastern LCGs and will gradually be rolled out to other areas in the springtime

Important: Do Not use CCG to refer to Belfast Eye Casualty unless you are a practice in the Belfast or South Eastern LCG area. All other practices must continue to refer using the clinical advice line and paper referral until informed otherwise.

Important: Belfast & South Eastern LCG practices: do not use CCG for referral to Belfast Eye Casualty from 24th – 27th December inclusive and 31st Dec – 2nd Jan inclusive as there will not be admin/CCG triage cover and a risk of delay in patients being triaged. Use the clinical advice line for referral as usual.

Reminder of COVID19 guidance and advice

A brief summary reminder of COVID19 guidance and advice was issued to practices in the first week of December. This included a reminder of the current HSC guidance on COVID19 testing and use of LFDs for symptomatic testing of health care workers. Contractors are also reminded of the processes in relation to claims for reimbursement for PPE.

Please check your practice HSCNI email account for details. A small number of practices still do not access the HSC Optometry portal for claim submission (n=9) and agreed 'alternative' business email contacts are in place for this small number of practices.

Reminder: Access to vFire online portal for CCG and NIECR account password resets

Practices which are connected to the HSC Optometry Portal now have access to an online portal (known as “vFire”) for submitting requests for password resets for CCG and NIECR user accounts. Guidance on the use of the vFire portal was issued to all practices that are connected to the Portal in November.

Using vFire affords a more direct route for CCG and NIECR account password resets and avoids the need to log a call or send an email to request a password reset. From December 2022 the use of vFire is required also for password resets for **contractor practice HSCNI email accounts**.



Please check your practice email account for this communication or read the information hosted on the HSC Optometry Portal at the link “vFire Customer Portal” prior to using vFire as it is essential that you follow the guidance to ensure that your request is directed to the correct team in BSO IT services.

HSC Eye Services Waiting Lists – help in keeping them valid and up to date



We are all very conscious of the lengthy waiting lists which prevail for eye care services, both for out patient clinics and elective surgery in ophthalmology. Although this is an improving picture, HSC understand that some patients may choose to be referred to a private provider/clinic. **If a patient has attended an independent private provider/clinic, subsequent to having agreed and decided to be referred for HSC care**, you are asked to remind the patient to contact the HSC hospital eye service to have their name removed from any waiting list that they would have been included on for HSC-funded care which is no longer required. This is to ensure that eye services waiting lists are valid and up-to-date with appointments / surgery being offered only to those that still require them.

Your support for this discussion with your patients is greatly appreciated as there is no automatic notification sent by the independent sector to an HSC Trust to inform that a patient on an HSC waiting list has received their care and treatment.

The importance of recognising and reporting an Adverse Incident



Ophthalmic Services, SPPG have had an increased number of eye related 'interface incidents' reported. For ophthalmic services these are incidents, most commonly reported by HSC Trusts, where it is noted that primary care optometry has had some involvement with the incident and they require full and detailed investigation by HSC staff. All Optometrists are reminded of the importance of being cognisant in your clinical practice of when an incident may have occurred (including an interface incident) and the process for reporting/submission of an Adverse Incident (information at the following link [Adverse Incident Reporting \(hscni.net\)](https://hscni.net)).

Update on the Ocular Hypertension Review & Monitoring Service

In the last [Newsletter](#) (July 2022, [click here to read](#)) you will have read that planning was ongoing in relation to the OHT Review and Monitoring Service with the aim of including additional components of clinical care within the service specification. The service which was launched at the start of 2019 requires significant commitment from a practice perspective, both in terms of clinical input and administrative work and is supported by a high level of governance including failsafe processes requiring continual oversight by the optometrists involved. Following lengthy engagement with the optometrists providing the service, the relevant contractors and Optometry Northern Ireland (ONI), the service has now been updated with agreement on the processes for providing clinical care for patients who need to commence treatment (aligning with the 2022 update to NICE Guidelines).

It is appreciated that many optometry practices are facing pressures at this time to provide both core and enhanced eyecare services. Sincere thanks are extended to the optometrists and contractors for their support in the review and implementation of the OHT Service which it is acknowledged adds an additional level of communication, administration and clinical care within the practice ensuring that patients who are part of the service are reviewed in line with service protocols and guidance.

An Eye to the Future – ‘encompass’ is coming

Many of you are regular users of the Northern Ireland Electronic Care Record (NIECR) since optometry was given access in late 2018 to the ‘Optometry-view NIECR’. Access to NIECR allows optometrists to review and see relevant medical and ophthalmic information on their patients, aiding clinical decision making and continuity of care. NIECR will be replaced by a system called [‘encompass’](#) which is the new health and social care record for citizens of Northern Ireland. The introduction and implementation of encompass will take place on a phased basis with the first area (South Eastern Trust) anticipated to go-live in late 2023. For optometrists working in primary care information will be available through **‘encompass link’** and work is ongoing to ensure that the current level of information in NIECR is available going forward with ‘encompass link’. Discussions will centre on user access permissions, information access and potential opportunities for notifications and ability to direct agreed communications to secondary care. **** Please read more about encompass and what is planned at the following link: [The encompass Programme - a digital integrated care record for NI \(hscni.net\)](#) ****



Continued Personal Development (CPD): Upcoming Webinars



Please remember, as we approach the end of 2022, to upload all your CPD points with the GOC before the end of year 1 of the cycle. Remember providers no longer upload points, and it's the registrant's responsibility to do this in the new CPD system. You also must have completed the requisite number of points annually to be allowed to continuing to practice.

The following sessions have been planned for 2023, click on the links to book. Please note that these sessions cover the annual mandatory training requirement for NI enhanced services, PEARS and LES II.

1. CPD SESSION ON MANAGING SWOLLEN OPTIC DISCS – NI PEARS ACCREDITED SESSION and 1 CPD POINT AVAILABLE

Swollen Optic Nerve(s): What do I do now? Tuesday 10th January 2023 9.30am-10.45am

Mr Lorcan Butler, Optical Engagement Optometrist, The Brain Tumour Charity.

This CPD session **is also a NI PEARS accredited session** so please ensure all practitioners and colleagues are made aware of the session, as it will be very informative and useful to all practitioners.

Swollen Optic Nerves in the consulting room are not a normal appearance and can cause concern for the examining practitioner. The presentation will go through a comprehensive differential diagnosis to aid the practitioner with their tentative diagnosis and assist you with deciding if a referral is necessary and where it should be directed to.

Please click on the registration link below to book your place at this CPD session.

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/5138992430903976203>

If you have problems accessing the above link please copy and paste the hyperlink into your browser. Once you have registered for the event please do not share your login link with anybody else as this link is registered to your personal details.

2. CPD SESSION – BLEPHAROKERATOCONJUNCTIVITIS: RECOGNISE IT AND ACT – NI PEARS ACCREDITED SESSION and 1 CPD POINT AVAILABLE

Blepharokeratoconjunctivitis: Recognise and Act - Monday 27th February 2023 3.00pm – 4.15pm

Mr Michael O’Gallagher, Consultant Ophthalmologist Belfast HSC Trust.

This CPD session **is also a NI PEARS accredited session** so please ensure all practitioners and colleagues are made aware of the session, as it will be very informative and useful to all practitioners.

Blepharokeratoconjunctivitis can be a serious condition if missed, this presentation should answer some of the questions you have in relation to recognising and managing it safely and appropriately.

Please click on the link below to book your place at this CPD session.

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/1722079728479657818>

If you have problems accessing the above link please copy and paste the hyperlink into your browser. Once you have registered for the event please do not share your login link with anybody else as this link is registered to your personal details.

3. CPD SESSION – SLT, WHAT THE OPTOMETRIST NEEDS TO KNOW – LES II ACCREDITED SESSION and 1 CPD POINT AVAILABLE

SLT: What the Optometrist Needs to Know - Monday 20th March 2023 9.30am-10.45am

Prof Augusto Azuara-Blanco, Consultant Ophthalmologist Belfast HSC Trust and Queens University Belfast.

This CPD session **is also a LES II accredited session** so please ensure all practitioners and colleagues are made aware of the session, as it will be very informative and useful to all practitioners.

SLT is becoming more of a topical subject and this presentation should answer some of the questions you have in relation to this new and emerging treatment.

Please click on the link below to book your place at this CPD session.

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/633718247525560334>

If you have problems accessing the above link please copy and paste the hyperlink into your browser. Once you have registered for the event please do not share your login link with anybody else as this link is registered to your personal details.

General Optical Council

SPPG is pleased to note the recent appointment of Mr William Stockdale as registrant council member, the appointment having been approved by Privy Council

William is a contact lens and dispensing optician with 30 years' clinical and business experience in Northern Ireland. He is the former chair of Optometry Northern Ireland and has also held a non-executive position with FODO, The Association for Eye Care Providers.

We wish William every success in the role and know that he will bring wisdom, experience, guidance and system thinking to the role.

Two new FCOptoms in the SPPG Ophthalmic Team

Janice McCrudden and Raymond Curran have both been awarded Fellowship of the College of Optometrists.



Janice achieved her Fellowship by portfolio and Raymond was awarded a Life Fellowship, the citation outlining:

“The College particularly recognises your service as Head of Ophthalmic Services for the Department of Health in Northern Ireland, and the improvements you have made to eye care that have benefited both College Members and patients. This has been as a direct result of your tireless efforts to improve patient care and to encourage those you work with to appreciate the value of optometrists.”

This is a very significant achievement and honour for both of them and we offer them many congratulations.



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 \(college-optometrists.org\)](http://www.college-optometrists.org)

