

## General Ophthalmic Services Memorandum

4 September 2024

**To be read in conjunction with MOS/280**

To all Ophthalmic Contractors

Dear Contractor

### UPDATED GUIDANCE ON HEALTH AND CARE NUMBERS (HCNs)

**Please share this important MOS with all staff, both clinical and support staff, including locums. It is to be read in conjunction with MOS/280.**

It is a statutory requirement for all patients who are eligible for General Ophthalmic Services and/or Ophthalmic Enhanced Services to provide their **Health and Care Number (HCN)** when they are accessing these services in your practice.

The HCN is a unique identifier provided to every patient registered for access to funded health and care services in Northern Ireland. It is a unique ten-digit number and can be found at the top of all medical cards issued in Northern Ireland since 2004. It may also be accessed through the Ophthalmic Claims System (OCS) **HCN 'look up' facility**.

#### **1. Why is the Health and Care Number an essential requirement?**

Every patient who is eligible for General Ophthalmic Services (GOS) and/or Enhanced services e.g. NIPEARS, must hold a valid HCN prior to accessing the service. Claims submitted without a valid HCN cannot not be paid.

As with patients who attend a community practice, all patients in a domiciliary setting must have a valid HCN to access a GOS eye examination.

#### **2. What happens if the patient does not have a current HCN/ registration?**

If a patient presents to your practice and they do not currently have a valid Health and Care Number (HCN) you must advise them that they cannot access General



Ophthalmic Services or HSC-funded Enhanced Services until they have a valid/current HCN.

### 3. For a patient who has HCN registration – how can you get the details?

#### Methods to secure the information on / details of a current, valid HCN:

**a) OCS Look Up** This is a real time look-up facility for the purposes of identifying the HCNs of patients who present to your practice. This look-up facility will check the name and date of birth as given to you by the patient and find their HCN. If the patient cannot be located on the HCN database it means they have either given inaccurate name or date of birth or do not have a valid HCN and a claim for GOS or Enhanced Services cannot be paid.

**b) Medical Card:** If a patient does not have their medical card they can request a medical card from the Business Services Organisation (see contact details below) and if there is a genuine urgency a new medical card may be sent from BSO within a few days.

To apply for a new medical card the patient should either:

Click link [here](#).

**Or**

Tel: 028 9536 0333, select option 4

**BSO Ophthalmic Services:** Contractors can contact BSO if they have any queries regarding patient HCN. Medical registrations Tel: 028 9536 0333, select option 4

## 4. Patients who may not have valid HCNs

### Temporary HCNs

If a patient has recently moved to Northern Ireland they may have been issued, short term, with a temporary number by the hospital to enable them to access urgent care. This number is **not valid** for accessing GOS or Enhanced services. The patient will have to either wait until their permanent HCN is issued, be seen in a private capacity, or, if it is deemed that urgent eyecare is required, contact Eye Casualty.



It is sometimes difficult to ascertain if the number is temporary. **If a patient is new to your practice always check that their HCN is valid by using the OCS 'look up' facility or, where OCS is not used, contact BSO Medical Registrations tel: 028 9536 0333, select option 4, before providing services.**

### **Health care numbers issued in other UK regions**

Healthcare numbers issued in England, Scotland or Wales are **not valid** for accessing GOS or Enhanced Services in Northern Ireland. Claims submitted with one of these numbers cannot be paid.

Patients from England, Scotland or Wales must either register with a GP in NI or be seen in a private capacity. If they are deemed to require urgent eyecare contact Eye Casualty.

### **Old medical numbers**

If your patient presents with an older medical card (pre-2004) the number on the medical card could be one of several health care identifiers previously used, for example, the CHI number. These numbers are **NOT** an acceptable alternative and you must ask your patient to obtain their HCN or look it up on OCS. The health service numbers on old medical cards are no longer used by the BSO or, other HSC organisations.

### **Patients presenting with Hospital Vouchers**

If a patient attends for dispensing/supply of glasses with a voucher(s) issued from a hospital clinic they still must have a valid HCN to redeem the voucher. Always check that the HCN is valid by using the OCS 'look up' facility or, where OCS is not used, contact BSO Medical Registrations tel: 028 9536 0333, select option 4, before providing supplying glasses.

**REMINDER - claims for GOS or Enhanced Services submitted without a valid HCN cannot be paid. Always check the validity of the patient's HCN before providing the HSC funded service.**

**For queries in relation to this guidance please contact:**

**Ophthalmic Services, Business Services Organisation**

**Tel:** 028 9536 0333 Option 1 **Email:** [priorapproval.bso@hscni.net](mailto:priorapproval.bso@hscni.net)