

**Primary Care Optometry
Acute Eyecare Pathway
Important Update on Belfast Trust Eye Casualty
Updated June 2020**

Belfast Trust Eye Casualty, as with primary care optometry and other services, are having to adapt their service due to the restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Their aim is to ensure safe access and care for those patients who need urgent specialist ophthalmology care both currently and through the pandemic recovery period.

This guidance contains **important information** for all optometric practices across NI about changes to the service and is particularly relevant to those practitioners who refer patients to Belfast Trust Eye Casualty. This will have a direct impact on your practice and the care that you provide to your patients.

Please ensure this update is shared with, and read carefully by, all your practice staff including locums.

Belfast Trust Eye Casualty: Important Changes

In common with other eye casualty services, Belfast Trust Eye Casualty has a high proportion of patients attending who self-refer i.e. are “walk in” patients, who have minor, non-sight threatening problems that could be appropriately managed in primary care.

- From **1st June 2020** the current Belfast Trust Eye Casualty service **will change from a “walk in” to a “referral only”** emergency / urgent secondary care (hospital) eye service.
- As is usual now, any optometrist with a patient whom they deem requires urgent referral to the Belfast Trust Eye Casualty must contact Eye Casualty for triage advice and to arrange an appointment for the patient. No patient will be accepted from an optometry practice or GP practice as a “walk in” referral i.e. the practice **must** contact Eye Casualty for an appointment before sending the patient. Similar advice is being provided to GP practices.
- Patients contacting Eye Casualty who have not attended their optometrist first and who appear to have a minor non sight threatening condition will be redirected to an NIPEARS provider practice. Patients will be encouraged to attend their usual practice if it is an NIPEARS provider. Eye Casualty has been provided with the current list of NIPEARS practices and a member of staff may contact the practice on the patient’s behalf. Please

ensure that arrangements for telephone access to your practice monitored and managed carefully.

- Under the current COVID -19 Urgent Care arrangements optometrists are encouraged to manage their patients remotely where possible and should continue to use their own clinical judgement to decide when this is appropriate and when a face to face consultation is indicated.
- GPs are being issued with updated guidance both from the Belfast Trust and also from HSCB on the Acute Eyecare pathway including how urgent eyecare is being provided currently during the pandemic and guidance on which patients it is appropriate to refer to primary care optometry.

Eye Casualty has developed several new strategies to assist in improving patient care and communication between all clinicians involved in the acute eyecare pathway. These include:

Eye Casualty Clinical Advice and Referral Line

Eye Casualty now has a **dedicated telephone line** number: **028 96150093** which optometrists and GPs may use to speak directly to a member of Eye Casualty staff to discuss a potential referral, arrange an appointment for a patient, if appropriate, and for advice on ongoing management of a patient within their practice. If the Eye Casualty clinician manning the phone is already on a call please leave your name, practice name and telephone number and your call will be returned as soon as possible.

This line is for use by optometrists/GPs only and **must not** be given out to patients.

Note: the mobile “Baton phone” number previously made available should not be now used.

Referral Support Inbox

A new Eye Casualty email Inbox is being created to enable optometrists and GPs to send images e.g. photograph/video/ scan of clinical findings to support the telephone triage process. This will be for receipt of emails only and cannot be used for reply but Eye Casualty has been provided with the HSC email addresses for all practices that have an HSC email account to enable two way electronic communications. Further information about this will be issued shortly.

Patient General Enquiry Line

Belfast Trust are implementing an Ophthalmology Enquiry line for use by patients **tel: 028 96 151944**. This automated service will advise patients that that they are through to the ophthalmology general enquiry line and offer the options list below

No	Service
1	Macular
2	Glaucoma
3	DESP
4	Ward 28 (In px)
5	EODU (day case unit)
6	Paediatric Ophthalmology
7	Level 8B
8	Eye Casualty
9	All other enquiries

This will enable patients who require advice to reach the appropriate speciality, inpatient ward, Eye Casualty or, if the required option is not available, they can leave a general enquiry with an Admin team member who will forward their query to the appropriate service.

This Acute Eyecare pathway guidance will be updated when routine primary care optometry services including NIPEARS resume.
In the meantime if you have any queries regarding this guidance or any other aspect of the Acute Eyecare pathway please contact any of one the optometric advisers.

Fiona North: fiona.north@hscni.net

Janice McCrudden: janice.mccrudden@hscni.net

Margaret McMullan: margaret.mcullan@hscni.net