



On 5<sup>th</sup> March 2018 the Southern Primary Care Acute Eyecare Service, SPEARS, became NI PEARS and was extended from the southern LCG area to include provision of the service by optometry practices in both the Belfast and the Western LCG areas. The service is now being provided in 130 primary care optometry practices, providing local access to optometry led eye care for patients with sudden onset eye conditions.

This first NI PEARS Update is aimed at supporting you in the provision of the service. It provides important guidance and information, based on frequently asked questions, and contains links to useful forms and documents to assist you in providing care for your patients with acute eye problems.

Please share this important Update with all NI PEARS accredited optometrists in your practice.

### *Who may provide NI Pears?*

- **Individual optometrists**

An optometrist must be GOC registered, have an NI personal code, hold the MECS 1 and MECS 2 qualification either from WOPEC or Ulster University, and have attended an HSCB facilitated NI PEARS sign up session in order to be accredited to provide the service. To maintain accreditation optometrists are required to attend a HSCB facilitated NIPEARS training update event annually.

**Note: Trainee optometrists (previously known as pre registration optometrists) may not provide NI PEARS, even under supervision.**

- **Contractor Practices**

Practices must have completed and returned an Enhanced Service Declaration form to be retained on the HSCB NI PEARS provider list. This is an annual requirement. (Your practice will have been contacted by HSCB staff in the past few weeks if the form has not been returned).

### *Promotion of the service*

GPs and Community Pharmacists in Belfast and the Western LCG areas have been provided with information about the service, including training information for staff on which patients may be eligible to be referred for an NI PEARS assessment, and a link to the list of practices providing NI PEARS.

## Promotion of the service (Continued)

To view this information see an example, issued to GP practices in the Belfast area see the following link: *(Press Ctrl + click on link)*

<http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/pdf/NI%20PEARS%20Belfast%20%20-%20Information%20for%20GPs%20%20Pharmacists%20May%202018%20Final.pdf>

To view the list of primary care optometry practices providing NI PEARS see either of the following links:

On the BSO website: *(Press Ctrl + click on link)*

<http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/pdf/NI%20PEARS%20Accredited%20Optometry%20Practices%2030May18.xlsx>

On the HSCB internet site: *(Press Ctrl + click on link)*

<http://www.hscboard.hscni.net/our-work/integrated-care/ophthalmic-services/primary-eye-care/>

## An NI PEARS appointment or not? Triageing the patient.

One of the most challenging aspects of providing NI PEARS is deciding which patients need an assessment. It is essential that all staff, both optometrists and other practice staff, are fully aware of the “Inclusion/Exclusion” criteria, as detailed in the service specification; a copy is attached.



The reception staff at the front desk are usually the first point of contact with the patient, whether the patient contacts the practice by phone or presents in person. These staff therefore have an essential role in triaging the patient. Attached is a NI PEARS Triage Flowchart that staff may find useful in deciding whether a patient is eligible for an NI PEARS assessment and this may also be accessed at:

*(Press Ctrl + click on link)*

<http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/pdf/NI%20PEARS%20Triage%20Flow%20Chart.pdf>

It is important to remember that NI PEARS is for patients presenting with acute i.e. sudden or recent onset, symptoms. One of the most important facts to find out is how long the patient has been experiencing their symptoms e.g. “How long has your eye been red/sore”? If the answer is “since yesterday” or “in the past few days” they may be eligible for an NI

The Triage Flowchart is a tool to help staff with this decision making. You are encouraged to use it or adapt it to suit your own practice needs. Staff training in this triage is vital to support staff in making the most appropriate decisions for the care of your patients.

## Clinical Record Keeping

As with all patient episodes, it is essential to maintain full, accurate and contemporaneous clinical records for all NI PEARS assessments.

The patient record should be clearly identified “NI PEARS” to differentiate it from the findings related to a routine eye examination, or contact lens aftercare etc. All clinicians in a practice are advised to use the same format and location within the patient records for recording NI PEARS assessments. This is particularly relevant with computerised records to ensure all clinicians know exactly where to view any NI PEARS records.



**It is essential that clinical recording of the provision of NI PEARS assessments is in line with the GOC Standard 8 on Clinical Record Keeping, and it is recommended that it includes:**

- *Date of assessment*
- *Detailed history & symptoms, including length of presence of symptoms.*
- *Details and findings of all investigations carried out*
- *Diagnosis*
- *Management plan*
- *Advice given to patient*



***A useful template to follow is that used by IP optometrists in their Prescribing Log Book***

***This detailed record keeping is essential for continuity of care for the patient and as evidence of service provision—see also section below on probity assurance.***

## Recommending Treatments

The majority of conditions presenting to NI PEARS will be self-limiting, requiring no treatment. However if you are recommending an ophthalmic preparation, the patient has two options for obtaining their treatment, either:

- Purchase from Community Pharmacist:  
If it is an “over the counter medication” e.g. chloramphenicol, the patient should be directed to their local community pharmacist to purchase it.  
or
- Obtaining treatment by prescription.

If you are an IP qualified optometrist with a HS21 prescription pad you may issue the prescription to the patient yourself.

Otherwise a request needs to be made to the patient’s GP.

A Prescription Request Form may be downloaded from the following link, designed to make this request straightforward: *(Press Ctrl + click on link)*

<http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/pdf/ni%20pears%20prescription%20request%20form%20new.pdf>

### **\*\*\*Urgent treatment\*\*\***

If the patient requires a prescription this will take at least 48 hours to be issued by the GP practice from receipt of the prescription request form. If you deem treatment needs to be started quickly e.g. chloramphenicol for a significant corneal abrasion, this should be explained to the patient and they should be encouraged to purchase it from the community pharmacist.

**Remember to refer to the College of Optometrists Clinical Management guidelines for up-to-date guidance on recommended management/treatments:**

*(Press Ctrl + click on link)* [Clinical Management Guidelines](#) and the

**NI Formulary for treatment guidelines specific to Dry Eye:** *(Press Ctrl + click on link)* [11.0 Eye](#)

## Communication with referring clinicians.

If you see a patient under NI PEARS who has been referred by their GP, it is best practice to provide a report to the GP on the outcome. You may either write a letter to the GP or, to make this more straightforward, a GP Referral Response form has been developed:

*(Press Ctrl + click on link)*

<http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/pdf/NI%20PEARS%20GP%20Referral%20Report%20Form.pdf>

If the referral has come from the community pharmacist you are not required to provide a formal response to the pharmacist. However if you have the opportunity to speak to your local pharmacists about the service in general or specific cases and proposed treatments this would encourage good relationships.



## Managing NI Pears

- **Patient declaration**

Practices using OCS for electronic submission of claims are reminded that any patient accessing NI PEARS must sign the Patient Declaration Form LESPR (pink). This form, like the OCSPR form, must be retained for 7 years (6 years plus the year of service). Further copies can be obtained by contact BSO Ophthalmic Services tel: 02895363752.

- **Probity assurance**

NI PEARS activity will be monitored from the claim information, as is currently done for GOS activity. Any providers who are outliers will have more in depth analysis of their NI PEARS provision. In addition a review of a sample of NI PEARS claims will now also be included routinely at a practice probity visit. Some practices will already have undergone this check during their routine probity visit. These probity processes are required to provide assurance that the claim and, therefore, the payment is appropriate.



At a probity visit the optometric adviser will review a sample of recent NI PEARS claims against the patient clinical records for assurance of service provision. The records must show evidence of appropriate provision of the service as described under "Clinical Record Keeping" above. If this information is not recorded in sufficient detail the adviser may not have assurance that the appropriate level of service had been provided and the NI PEARS fee may be recovered.

## And finally ...

The aim of NIPEARS is to make best use of your, the optometrist's, clinical skills and equipment, expanding your primary care role to treat more people closer to home, freeing capacity in general medical practice and in secondary care clinics and Eye Casualty. This is inline with Ministerial Vision outlined in "Health & Well Being 2026—Delivering Together".

HSCB commend practices and accredited optometrists for their commitment to providing this new and transformational service.



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## Contact Information

If you have a query about any aspect of NI PEARS provision please contact any one of the optometric advisers.

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