

Optometry Bulletin No: 14**July 2021**

The Health and Social Care Board continue to extend thanks to all ophthalmic contractors and their staff working in primary care for their dedication to eyecare provision at this time. The balance between restrictions hopefully easing and the numbers of the new delta variant cases rising continues to present challenges to the wider healthcare family. Your contribution to the care of patients and eye health has been recognised very positively.

Thank you again for your continued care for patients at this time, your commitment and efforts are valued by Ophthalmic Services and by the wider HSC system.

Raymond Curran, Head of Ophthalmic Services

Lateral Flow Tests for Primary Care Optometry Contractor practices

We wrote to all contractors on 11th May regarding Lateral Flow Testing for asymptomatic patient-facing Primary Care staff. Ophthalmic Services has worked with PHA colleagues to facilitate a streamlined ordering process for Ophthalmic Contractors. We became aware of some contractors having not received an email directly from Department of Health, so followed up with a reminder email to each contractor on 30th June. This email contains your Unique Organisation Number (UON), which should be used when logging onto the ordering website (<https://request-testing.test-for-coronavirus.service.gov.uk/>). If you have not received either of these emails and wish to order Lateral Flow Tests, please contact Ophthalmic.Services@hscni.net

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): HSC funded eye services

As lockdown restrictions ease there has been no indication of plans to step down infection prevention and control procedures or social distancing for healthcare settings in the coming months.

Contractors and individual optometrists should therefore continue to enforce robust IPC measures within their practices and during the provision of eyecare services. The advice in relation to PPE and when it should be worn remains unchanged. The links at the bottom of this bulletin will provide up to date advice in respect of IPC if you need clarification on any aspect.

The grant scheme operated by HSCB for PPE purchased 20/21 continues to accept receipts, so if you have not yet submitted these to ophthalmic services do so as soon as possible.

HSCB are in consultation currently with the DOH regarding funding and grant availability for the next financial year. You will be updated on any developments with this.

Please contact ophthalmic.services@hscni.net should you have any queries in regard to the recent reimbursement process for PPE and remember to submit any outstanding claims as soon as possible.

Patient Signatures on GOS Forms

The current suspension of the need for patients to sign ophthalmic forms, to help limit the transmission of coronavirus, (COVID-19 is still in place in Northern Ireland. You may have read that NHS England had planned to reinstate the requirement for patients to sign forms effective from July 2021. Whilst this NHSE policy has now been pushed back due to emergence of the delta variant, in Northern Ireland we are currently reviewing data and awaiting further advice from the DOH. Any further updates in relation to the capture of patient signatures for GOS and enhanced services will be circulated to all contractor practices in due course but in the meantime the suspension of patient's requirement to sign GOS or enhanced service forms is still in place.

FSS (Financial Support Scheme)

As of 7 July 2021, Minister has approved the continuation of the provision of the Financial Support Schemes support to GOS contractors until the end of Q2 2021/22. Contractors are reminded that FSS 2 payments are made if there is slippage in that month's budget after the GOS payment has been made.

The FSS1 payment to mobile only contractors will also continue into Quarter 2. Both schemes will be subject to review.

Orthoptic Services: Update and Guidance – some points to note

Contractors and individual Optometrists working in practice are reminded of the process and pathway for [referrals to the Orthoptic services](#) regionally. The guidance ([click here to access directly](#)) has been uploaded to the optometry referral information page at the following link: <https://hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/2485.htm>.

In addition contact information for the Orthoptic clinics in all HSC Trusts and is hosted on the paediatric eyecare information page at the following link: <https://hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/2699.htm>

Optometrists are reminded of the following key points when considering referral for patients with orthoptic problems:

- ✓ Patients with **Diplopia** should be referred to **Ophthalmology** (i.e. to General Ophthalmology)
- ✓ Patients with **Sudden Onset Diplopia** should be referred to **Eye Casualty**

N.B When referring patients with diplopia to Ophthalmology/Eye Casualty, please ensure you follow the established referral processes for the relevant services.

Where referral to **Orthoptic services** is indicated:

- ✓ Where a HSC Trust has a process in place to accept eReferral via CCG to Orthoptic service* (***currently Northern, Southern and Western Trusts**) please send the referral via the CCG system. Please note the options for an adult referral and paediatric referral.
- ✓ Where a HSC Trust utilises a process for paper referrals to Orthoptic Services, please use the OP/OR1 referral form for paediatric patient referrals and the GOS 18 referral for adult patient referrals. Paper referral form templates are hosted on the following webpage:

<https://hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/2485.htm>

The challenges presented by COVID-19: what can we all do to help?

It is recognised currently that pressures exist across the entire HSC system and both primary care optometry and orthoptic services are collectively doing their very best to both clinically manage patients and also manage the expectations of parents/guardians of children who require assessment and treatment. It is important now more than ever that relationships are strong between both services and it is hoped that in early Autumn Orthoptic services will join in an information evening facilitated by HSCB primary care optometry to provide an update on the current work to help rebuild Orthoptic services and to discuss with primary care Optometry how services can work together for the benefit of children with eye problems at this time. Further information on this planned evening will be made available in the incoming weeks and months.

You may be aware that Orthoptic services in some Trust areas (Northern and Western) have a long established process for collaboration with primary care Optometry to assist in the management of the needs of children by providing GOS ST at identified points in the care of a child. This collaboration is very much appreciated and valued and has, to a degree, increased because of COVID-19 pressures.

To help with this processes have been put in place in recent months to streamline communications between primary care optometrists in practice and the Orthoptic Services in those specific Trust areas (*Northern and Western*) via a dedicated online feedback form. Orthoptic services in the Northern and Western Trust areas report that the feedback from practices is excellent and that this new process is working well.

Some points to remember and help when examining children.....

Optometrists are reminded of the following key points:

1. It is important that when seeing a child for their first eye examination that a **cycloplegic refraction using 1% Cyclopentolate is undertaken.**
2. A **cycloplegic refraction should be the basis for prescribing** for spectacles.
3. **Full RX (cyclo minus working distance) should always be given** and the child and parents advised on full time wear of spectacles. Current evidence based practice is that refractive correction is the initial mode of treatment for a period of 17 weeks. Where a child has been referred after a cycloplegic refraction + prescribing of spectacles, **please reassure the parent/guardian that Orthoptic services will be in touch to discuss the follow up assessments and plan for care.**
4. **Please do not instigate occlusion therapy for a child**, contact Orthoptic services if you have any specific concerns about a child. Occlusion therapy is not the first line of treatment for amblyopia and as noted above cycloplegic refraction is the basis for initial prescribing and treatment. [Contact details](https://hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/2699.htm) for all Orthoptic Services are noted on the paediatric eyecare information page and Orthoptic services are happy to deal with queries about patients <https://hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/2699.htm>

OPHTHALMIC SERVICES

5. **Where a cycloplegic refraction was not performed, please DO NOT prescribe spectacles for a child.** If referral is indicated following an eye examination please ensure that it is noted on the referral that a cycloplegic was **not** undertaken. Orthoptic services will triage all referrals based on the clinical information provided and allocate an appointment accordingly to include a cycloplegic refraction.

Post Payment Verification Visits

Post payment verification has continued during the COVID period through quarterly monitoring but routine visits were suspended. These visits are now being resumed from July. Practices will be offered the choice of either a face to face visit by a probity officer and optometry clinical adviser or a remote PPV process where the practice can submit copies of the samples of records requested for a desk top review by the adviser in HSCB. If your practice has been identified for a visit in this next three month period, a probity officer will be in contact with to discuss the options for your visit.

College of Optometrists Clinical Management Guidelines

The College of Optometrists Clinical Management Guidelines (CMGs) have become an invaluable tool to help clinical decision-making, diagnosis, and management, not just for optometry non-medical prescribers but for the optometry profession as a whole.

Always under review, the College is currently surveying the profession and membership as part of a wider project on CMG development.

Your participation in the survey would be much appreciated – please see link to the survey: [Improving our clinical resources - short survey on College's Clinical Management Guidelines \(college-optometrists.org\)](https://college-optometrists.org/improving-our-clinical-resources-short-survey)

Mobile Eye Services

An MOS (<https://hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/2377.htm>) has been issued to all practices providing updated guidance on obtaining patient consent for provision of a domiciliary eye examination and on the notification period for visits. If your practice provides mobile services please ensure all staff read this important information.

Cross Border Healthcare Directive

As you may be aware, Health Minister Robin Swann is due to reinstate the cross-border healthcare directive to the Republic of Ireland. The directive is a temporary measure for a 12 month period.

The Republic of Ireland Reimbursement Scheme sets out a framework, that will allow patients to seek and pay for treatment in the private sector in Republic of Ireland and have the costs reimbursed. Costs will be reimbursed up to the cost of the treatment in Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland. All treatment is subject to prior authorisation.

For further information click link:

<http://www.hscboard.hscni.net/travelfortreatment/>

Learning from, and Reflecting on, Incidents in practice

An important part of good governance and continued personal and professional development relates to learning from incidents and how we reflect on and apply the learning from them in our clinical practice. Please take note of the two incidents below. They should encourage you to reflect on your clinical practice and help identify if there are components or elements of the care you provide or the set up in your practice which need to be reviewed and improved.

1. Delayed referrals

Three adverse incidents (AIs) in respect of delayed referrals have been reported to HSCB. A number of referrals from practice(s) were not actioned and this came to light only when patient records were reviewed in the practice.

If you observe a sign or symptom of injury and disease which you cannot manage within your competence or scope of practice you should refer the patient onwards for appropriate care/management. You must refer patients with appropriate urgency and in a timely manner. It is important to ensure that you complete referrals as soon as practically possible to ensure they are accurate and actioned. Primary care clinical practice can be busy and this can give rise to time-management challenges; delaying the completion of a referral can risk it being overlooked completely. Practices/practitioners should ensure they allow enough time for referrals to be completed and all patient management actioned.

If you locum in a practice please ensure all referrals are completed before you leave each day. The College of Optometrist Guidance for Professional Practice C188 -216 and the GOC Standards give further information on referrals:

- <https://guidance.college-optometrists.org/guidance-contents/communication-partnership-and-teamwork-domain/working-with-colleagues/referrals>
- <https://standards.optical.org/areas/practice>
- <https://standards.optical.org/areas/businesses>

2. A patient fall in practice

An adverse incident (AI) occurred in a practice when an older patient fell and sustained a significant injury when stepping off the consulting room chair. Practitioners are reminded of the importance of ensuring that, if the consulting chair has been raised during the eye examination, it is lowered again before the patient steps off. Practitioners should remind the patient that they need to step off the chair and should supervise the patient to ensure they are safe and steady before they start to walk out

of the consulting room. HSCB appreciates the cooperation of the practice involved in this AI in agreeing to share this advice.

Learning And Training Opportunities

SAVE THE DATE OPHTHALMIC SERVICES WEBINARS

Please note the dates of upcoming HSCB Ophthalmic Service Webinars:

Wednesday 8th Sept session is in respect of post-operative cataract services and this re-scheduled session now combines clinical and operational information in one session. It is important if you wish to provide this service that you avail of this training as it will not only discuss the clinical elements but also the reporting of clinical outcomes via the Medisoft application and other administrative matters.

Tuesday 21st Sept will ensure you know about the changes in eye casualty and also what services the ECLO's can offer to your practice.

Tuesday 19th Oct is designed to help with all the patients who present reporting headaches and ensure appropriate management.

Mon 8th Nov NI PEARS mandatory approved training – this will be a discussion on the differential diagnosis of conjunctivitis and your last opportunity to attain PEARS accreditation.

Mon 6th Dec NI LES 2 Mandatory training- Details to follow

Click on the links below to reserve your place.

1. **Wednesday 8th Sept 2021 – 9am – 11am** - Post Operative Cataract Care – Clinical and Operational Management of the service (covering the 2 previously cancelled sessions)

Ms Julie Silvestri – Consultant Ophthalmologist and Clinical Director BHSC

Ms Geraldine Lowe – Training Manager Medisoft

OPHTHALMIC SERVICES

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/7520790791528989709>

2. **Tuesday 21st Sept 2021 – 10am – 11am** - HSCB Updates – ECLO Service and Eye Casualty updates.

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/8078136534185313807>

3. **Tuesday 19th Oct 2021 – 10am – 11.15am** - Headaches – What Next? **CET APPROVED – 1 POINT**

Dr Louise Rusk – GP, GP Trainer and Specialist Clinician in SEHSCT Neurology Headaches Clinic

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/7596312946113403403>

4. **Mon 8th Nov 2021 – 1pm -215pm** – Conjunctivitis – Differential diagnosis, management and treatment options **CET- 1 POINT and 1 IP POINT APPROVED**

Dr Deirdre Burns - Specialist Optometrist BHSCT

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/6134055940408816395>

5. **Mon 6th Dec 2021 Details to TBC** – LES 2 Mandatory Training

To be eligible for CET points you must stay on for the whole of the session, answer the questions during the session and ensure you are logged on individually to a device if there are a number of people attending the same session at your location.

We look forward to welcoming you to these sessions.

RNIB Visual Awareness Training and Access to ECLO's

A Visual Awareness Training online multi-media resource has been developed by the RNIB NI ECLO service, through the work of Martin Branney, Locum ECLO. You should already have received details of this to your practice by e mail on 10/06/2021 but if you have not already done so please do take a few minutes of your time to access this excellent resource using the following link:

<https://sway.office.com/ly0oXXKtGeIFxHCn?ref=Link>

Key elements covered include:

- Practical and emotional impact of sight loss
- Sight Loss - Northern Ireland context
- Certification and Registration
- ECLO and support available
- Patient Outcomes
- Improving practice and communication
- Principles of sighted guiding
- Eye Conditions
- Mobility Aids

RNIB are delighted to share this with you, and offer it for use in a similar way to that delivered by the RNIB NI ECLO Service Visual Awareness Training in the past. It is hoped that it can help meet a need for patients and, also help professionals who work and engage with persons who have sight loss.

Forms for feedback have been included and the training also provides access to 'Emotional Support Vision Champion' e-module, developed by RNIB / Fighting Blindness 'Need to Talk' project.

You are reminded that information on the ECLO service in Northern Ireland (including staff contact details) and the ECLO Service referral form are hosted on the following webpage:

<https://sway.office.com/ly0oXXKtGeIFxHCn?ref=Link>

Use of Lid Wipes for Lid Disease

Practice-based pharmacists in General Practice have become increasingly aware of community-optometry generated requests for GPs to prescribe lid wipes for blepharitis.

Colleagues are reminded that wipes for management of blepharitis are non NI formulary and patients should not be directed to GP practices for recommendations to be converted to a HS21 prescription.

Publication of Family Practitioner Services General Ophthalmic Statistics for Northern Ireland 2020/21

The publication of FPS GOS statistics are always of interest, perhaps more than ever in the very challenging times that we are living and working through.

Statistics for 2020/21 can be accessed here: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/news/publication-family-practitioner-services-general-ophthalmic-statistics-northern-ireland-202021>

The statistics show, among many interesting insights, the dramatic impact of Covid-19 on primary eyecare service provision in wave one, but also the remarkable rebuild taking us back to near pre-covid levels of activity whilst also continuing, and building on, pre-covid levels of NI PEARS and acute eye provision.

A Reminder of Contact Details: Belfast Trust Ophthalmology Enquiry Line

Contractors and individual Optometrists are reminded of the contact number for the 'Belfast Trust Ophthalmology Enquiry Line' as noted below. Patients may also avail of this contact number should they have any queries in relation to their referral or attendance at the hospital eye service clinics provided by Belfast Trust Ophthalmology Service.

The Ophthalmology General Enquiry Line is available from Monday 01 June 2020 – tel: 028 96151944. This is an automated service and will offer options for access to various sub-specialities within Ophthalmology as noted in the following table:

The Ophthalmology General Enquiry Line: 028 96151944

Ophthalmology Enquiry line			
Option No	Subsection No	Service	Contact telephone Number
1	1	Macular	028 95041289
	2	Glaucoma	028 95040042
	3	Diabetic Eye Screening Programme	028 96157600
2	1	EODU / Ward 27	028 96150391
	2	Ward 28	028 96150393
	3	Paediatric Ophthalmology	028 96150510
3	1	Level 8B	028 96150507
	2	Eye Emergency referral centre	028 96150093
4		All other enquiries please hold	

Advice and Support *****

If you have a query you can receive advice from the following HSC Staff:

- Janice McCrudden:
janice.mccrudden@hscni.net
- Fiona North:
fiona.north@hscni.net
- Margaret McMullan:
margaret.mcullan@hscni.net
- Scott Drummond:
scott.drummond@hscni.net
- Ophthalmic Services email:
ophthalmic.services@hscni.net



COVID-19 Pandemic Online Resources:

- **HSC Optometry COVID-19 information:**
Current page: <http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/3120.htm>
Archive page: <http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/3225.htm>

- **COVID-19 Public Health Agency:**
<https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/>

- **General Optical Council:**
https://www.optical.org/en/news_publications/Publications/joint-statement-and-guidance-on-coronavirus-covid19.cfm

- **College of Optometrists:** <https://www.college-optometrists.org/the-college/media-hub/news-listing/coronavirus-2019-advice-for-optometrists.html>

- **Association of Optometrists:** <https://www.aop.org.uk/coronavirus-updates>

- **Health and Safety Executive** [Coronavirus: latest information and advice - HSE news](#)