

Simon Stevens  
Chief Executive  
NHS England  
PO Box 16738  
Redditch  
B97 9PT

Monday 22 January 2018

Dear Simon

We are writing again following the meeting between the Optical Confederation and NHS England on 16 January 2018, to express our members' utter frustration, dissatisfaction and anger about the continuing failure of the Primary Care Support England (PCSE) service delivered by Capita for NHS England. We echo the views of our colleagues at the BMA, as expressed in Richard Vautrey's recent letter to you, that the situation is now completely unacceptable.

As you will be aware, we raised these failures - and the frustration and unfunded costs to our members - on a number of occasions in 2016-17 with you and Karen Wheeler, and sought to help NHS England identify workable solutions.

Despite the numerous recovery and rectification plans Capita have promised, the first dating back to April 2016, the ophthalmic payment service is still failing and is well below any acceptable service standard. Even where services had seemed to improve, we have now slipped back to a point where no-one in our sector has any confidence in Capita.

PCSE's inability to execute the processing and payment of CET claims within the expected timescales for the second year running illustrates the level of operational incompetence within the service; this is a very simple administrative task - one claim per optometrist per year during a pre-set period - and the volume of claims in 2017 was no greater than PCSE had been advised it would be.

The timeliness of the processing of Performers List and GOS contract applications also remains a problem and has a direct impact on patient care. It is important for normal operational business to be prioritised immediately to address the ongoing widespread inaccuracy of GOS payments and to sort out the continuing problems with the grants, performer listing and GOS contact applications systems.

Despite the concentrated support that has been provided by the NHS England Intensive Expert Management Team, to which we continue to provide seconded staff, we have deep and increasing concerns about the standard of service provided by Capita and the prospects for the future. It is our firm view that the time for workarounds and yet more plans with Capita is now past and that the situation is beyond recovery without radical action by NHS England, its Chief Executive and Board.

There is a further major problem with the reconciliation of past GOS claims. It is clear to us that Capita is never going to prioritise or deal with this effectively. We therefore formally request that you remove this task from Capita with immediate effect and commission another service provider on a one-off 'task and finish' basis to complete this analysis and conclude payments, including 'goodwill' payments, by an agreed date.

Looking ahead Capita's performance has given us, as it must have given you, zero confidence in their ability to manage the ambitious transformation and sustainability plan needed and which we are keen to see delivered, but not on the back of service failings to our members. We feel strongly that Capita has now had more than generous opportunities to rectify the problems with the ophthalmic payments service and that unless a cast iron guarantee can be provided by the end of the financial year (Q4 2017-18) that the backlog of payment issues will be resolved by the end of June (Q1 2018-19) and the service will be operating at the required standard by that point, the time has come for NHS England to seriously consider an alternative provider. We understand the options are limited in terms of providers with the expertise and infrastructure required to deliver the ophthalmic payments service and suggest the NHS Business Services Authority should be considered given their portfolio includes the administration of high volume transaction based services such as NHS Dental Services and NHS Prescription Services.

We appreciate there would be significant upheaval involved for all parties if the service was to move to another provider, however, we feel it is in our members' best interests in the long term.

We would like to meet with NHS England at the earliest possible opportunity to discuss these issues and solutions in more detail. The diary contact here would be Jonathan Carey at [jonathan@fodo.com](mailto:jonathan@fodo.com). If you have any questions in the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Copies of this letter go to the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Public Health and Primary Care Steve Brine, Sir Malcolm Grant, Emily Lawson, Andrew Kenworthy, and as previously, Paul Bauman, Steve Verdon, Gus Williamson, Jill Matthews, David Geddes, David Roberts and Dominic Hardy at NHS England, and Richard Vautrey at the BMA.

Yours sincerely

Sir Anthony Garrett, Association of British Dispensing Opticians

Henrietta Alderman, Association of Optometrists

David Hewlett, Federation of Opticians

Katrina Venerus, LOC Support Unit