

Minister outlines community vision for ophthalmic services

Eye care services could be brought further into the community after a review of NHS ophthalmic services.

Health minister Rosie Winterton set out the Government's vision for developing eye care services and launched a new commissioning toolkit for the NHS as she addressed the Delivering the Vision conference in York on 17th January.

The commissioning toolkit is designed to help the local NHS improve eye care services in a way that:

- keeps pace with a growing demand for eye care services as the number of older people increases over the next decade
- makes better use of community-based ophthalmic services, including high street optometric practices, that are convenient and accessible for patients, and improves patient experience



Launching the toolkit Rosie Winterton said:

"Eye care services are an area where there is clear potential to develop a wider range of community based services, making better use of the skills and resources in primary care, growing capacity and increasing patient choice. There are already some excellent examples of how the NHS and partner organisations are developing eye care services in new settings, like the high street, that are more convenient and accessible for patients.

"This toolkit will help PCTs develop eye care services that are appropriate for their local populations - making them more convenient and giving greater choice to patients. It is about tailoring eye care services to fit patients needs so services are accessed quicker and easier."



National schemes were never likely in England

says Bob Hughes, AOP Chief Executive, speaking from the Conference:

"Optometrists in England should see this as a cautious step forward, but one step nearer using a greater range of their skills and scope of practice."

"We have much more to achieve, and there are some areas where we will continue our discussions with the Department. For instance our Dispensing Optician colleagues have not been given the listing or recognition they deserve."

"However, there are many opportunities here and we will set about ensuring that we achieve eye care service provision in every PCT area matches the high level of care we see optometrists offering in Scotland and in Wales."

"Patients deserve to have acute services and eye condition monitoring available in the community. Only optometric practices can seriously and practically offer that service."

Blink
Inside

2.Extracts from the Toolkit
3.What they say about the Review



Highlights from the commissioning toolkit

Foreword by the Minister of State for Health Services



I am pleased to launch this toolkit, which emerges from our review of General Ophthalmic Services. The toolkit builds on the work of the Eye Care Services Steering Group, and on the eye care pilots that were set up following that work. As well as providing a substantial amount of background about eye care services more generally, it provides practical advice for primary care trusts and practice based commissioners on commissioning community based eye care services.

I very much hope that commissioners, working in partnership with professions, with patient representatives, and with provider organisations, will find this a valuable resource in improving local eye care services and eye health. I believe that it provides an excellent starting point from which we can look to build and develop the sorts of eye care services that are tailored to what patients – from all backgrounds – want and need.

Rosie Winterton
Minister of State for Health Services



Eye Care Services

Sources of advice for PCTs

Through the course of the GOS review, it has become evident that eye care professionals working in primary and in secondary care often do not have a forum for interaction. As a consequence, the scope for communication and for learning about each other's professional skills and interests is limited.

This situation arises in part because optometry has traditionally been on the periphery of the core NHS family. PCTs often have a limited knowledge about the wider range of eye care professionals, what skills they have to offer, and the range of services they can potentially provide. It is noteworthy that, where community based eye care schemes have become established, it is often from the bottom up, for example where there is a particularly

active local optical committee (LOC), or cross-membership between the LOC and the professional executive committee. This all points to the need for PCTs and practice based commissioners to get better advice about eye care services. This could involve the establishment of a local eye health group (which would need to interact effectively with the LOC) and mechanisms to secure advice directly from eye care professionals (e.g. an optometric adviser and ophthalmologists).

Local eye health groups

The core purpose of these groups is likely to be to:

- Improve communication between eye care professionals across secondary and primary care.

- Share ideas and knowledge about eye care services and the potential to redesign pathways for the benefit of patients.
- Share local knowledge and data about needs and current patterns of service delivery and use.
- Provide hands-on advice and solutions to commissioners in relation to service reviews, service redesign and the practical issues involved in commissioning new eye care services.
- Consider how best to implement changes.

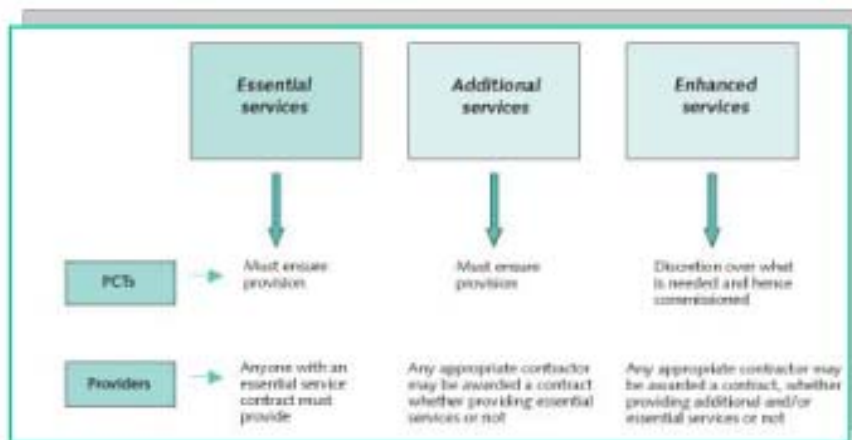
The GOS review – and the wider policy context

The GOS review provided an opportunity to assess how eye care services are currently provided, and specifically, how to support the NHS in commissioning a wider range of community based eye care services, where this is a clinically and cost-effective way of improving visual health and/or developing services that are more responsive to what patients want. There is a range of eye care professionals – optometrists, dispensing opticians, orthoptists, ophthalmic nurses, GPs with a special interest, ophthalmic medical practitioners and ophthalmologists – who could play a greater role in the delivery of community based services.

This commissioning toolkit sets eye care services within the context of the commissioning framework. A strong commissioning function lies at the heart of many of the current changes taking place in the NHS and will be critical to ensuring that the NHS provides high quality, value for money health care.

Summary

- The GOS Review confirms the view that there are a range of eye care services that could be delivered in community based settings. Much of this care is currently delivered in hospitals.
- The ECSSG proposed some model pathways in 2004, which have now been subject to piloting and evaluation. There have been other changes to the policy landscape which make the situation favourable for the development of a wider range of community based eye care services. The White Paper (Our Health, Our Care, Our Say) sets out the intention to provide services in settings that are more convenient and accessible for patients.
- The other key factor is demand for services, in particular as a result of an ageing population and improvements in medical treatment and technology. The mechanism by which these various factors can be taken into account in developing high quality eye care services is through the effective use of commissioning.



The full document is available on the AOP website



©CIBA Vision UK Ltd. A Novartis Company 2008

Focus[®] DAILIES[®] TORIC with AquaComfort[™]

NEW -1.50D cylinder available now!





Rosie Winterton MP
Minister of State
for Health

"As the demand for NHS eye care services grows with our aging population we need to be sure that the NHS is ready to respond."

"We start from a strong base. We have world-renowned hospital services...We also have a high-quality NHS sight testing service that provides patients with convenience and choice."

Blink

The GOS Review - what they say...



Brenda Billington
President
Royal College of
Ophthalmologists

"The Royal College of Ophthalmologists welcomes this excellent and thorough review of General Ophthalmic Services by the Department of Health."

"It highlights the potential for extending the provision of primary ophthalmic care into the local community, in order to better meet the needs of patients, through collaborative working between ophthalmologists, optometrists and other related professionals."

"The government's commissioning toolkit is a positive step towards improving eye care, and it is important that its recommendations are acted upon."



Lesley-Anne
Alexander
Chief Executive
Royal National
Institute of the Blind

"We need high quality and effective eye care services that can be accessed by all if we are to help people protect their sight and provide sufficient support for the two million people in the UK living with sight loss."



Speaking collectively, the Association of Optometrists, the Federation of Ophthalmic and Dispensing Opticians, Association of British Dispensing Opticians and the College of Optometrists said:

"Optometrists and dispensing opticians want to be able to utilise their high level of skills and training to offer new services for patients. Whilst the review does not give us a national scheme for England, other than for existing services, we see this as a starting point."

"It presents significant opportunities for practices to build on their excellent track record and provide a wider range of eye care for patients in the community. Achieving the necessary advances will be a challenge, but a challenge we know the profession is equal to."

"Whilst none of us expected a huge increase in fees, or the Scottish GOS to be repeated in England, it is disappointing that the opportunity to develop a limited additional service such as PEARS in Wales has been missed."



Trevor Warburton
AOP Chairman

"The good news is that the Department tells us that this is the beginning of a continuing process. The Review gives us a framework for additional and enhanced services, but we will push for further advances when we have the evaluation of the Welsh schemes."



Focus® DAILIES® TORIC with AquaComfort™

NEW -1.50D cylinder available now!

