



NICE draft guidance on occupational therapy and physical activity interventions to promote the mental wellbeing of older people in primary care and residential care

This is a joint response from the Association of British Dispensing Opticians (ABDO) Association of Optometrists (AOP), the College of Optometrists and the Federation of Ophthalmic & Dispensing Opticians (FODO).

Together ABDO, AOP, the College and FODO represent the 10,000 optometrists, over 5,000 dispensing opticians and optical businesses in the UK who provide high quality and accessible eye care services to the whole population.

We welcome the inclusion of eye sight tests under 'ensuring basic health needs are met'. We would like to highlight that over 60s are entitled to a free NHS sight test. Those who are unable to leave home owing to a physical or mental impairment are entitled to a free NHS domiciliary sight test in their own home or their care home. Occupational therapists, health and social care and voluntary practitioners should be made aware of older people's entitlements to, and the local availability, of these NHS services.

The draft guidance rightly points out that the increase in longevity among the UK population will lead to a greater proportion of older people being at risk of compromised health and wellbeing including sight loss. The incidence of eye disease such as glaucoma greatly increases as we get older, and glaucoma is asymptomatic in the early stages. Most glaucoma referrals to the hospital eye service originate from optometrists following a sight test, with the patient unaware that they have the condition. Preservation of sight is most likely if treatment is started before irreparable damage has been done to the person's sight and as the disease is asymptomatic, initially regular sight tests are a key part of this preservation strategy, particularly in patient groups most at risk of the disease (the elderly, those with a family history of the condition, and those from certain ethnic groups). We believe that in developing the guidance, consideration should be given to research which has examined the link between sight problems and depression, low self esteem and social isolation. A study by Evans JR et al British Journal of Ophthalmology Feb 2007, 'Depression and anxiety in visually impaired older people', found that visually impaired people had a higher prevalence of depression compared with people with good vision. Therefore early detection and treatment is crucial to ensure sight is preserved as much as possible, to help people maintain their independence and to reduce the risk of mental health problems such as depression. It is also important to recognise that poor vision is not necessarily just part of getting old. Poor vision may be a barrier to taking part in physical activity so ensuring older people have the optimum vision and maintain good eye health by having regular sight tests will help them to be more active.

Good eye health and good vision is also a factor in reducing the likelihood of accidents in the home such as falls. Falls can have a major impact on a person's confidence and ability to maintain their independence, as your guidance on 'the assessment and prevention of falls in older people', November 2004, addresses.

