

optometry scotland

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New NHS Optometry Contract

Optometry Scotland (OS) has been working with the Scottish Executive Health Department (SEHD) and Ministers to develop a new Optometry contract in Scotland. This is probably the most significant change in legislation concerning the provision of eyecare in Scotland in the last 60 years, and places Optometry firmly within the NHS as the principal provider of eyecare.

Through enabling legislation in the Smoking, Health and Social Care (Scotland) Act, OS has designed a new NHS Eye Examination. It has the following key benefits;

- ❑ It provides a free eye examination for every person in Scotland
- ❑ It is an examination that is appropriate to their needs and symptoms
- ❑ Refraction is not a mandatory part of the New NHS Eye Examination
- ❑ Optometrists can manage more eye conditions in the community
- ❑ Many patients will benefit from local, convenient & high quality care
- ❑ It will reduce inappropriate referrals to hospitals by the introduction of repeat tests and procedures i.e. a Supplementary examination
- ❑ It will encourage the use of dilation, contact applanation tonometry and full threshold fields
- ❑ It paves the way for an increase in co-managed care between hospital Ophthalmologists and local community Optometrists.
- ❑ It will encourage the establishment of care pathways for most common eye conditions
- ❑ It reduces health inequality by making rural and low volume practices more viable.

The new Eye Examination differs from the old GOS Sight Test by not requiring mandatory refraction, but provides a health assessment of the eyes that may lead to refraction, other procedures, repeat procedures, care pathways for sight threatening conditions, or other referral as appropriate for each and every patient, for each and every visit.

Anyone, whether they have red eyes, painful eyes, flashes and floaters, or just need new spectacles, will be able to access the new NHS at their local Optometry practice. The old GOS Sight Test will be consigned to history.

Initially there will be an expected upper limit of 20 NHS Primary examinations per normal working day. This will be kept under review particularly regarding how the Supplementary Examination is used. This will be pro-rata'd depending on hours worked and will be adjusted for pre-registration supervisors.

This will be the launch pad for a world class leading service in Scotland. Tying in with other developments over the next 2-3 years, Scotland will be at the forefront, working towards the Vision 2020 aim of eliminating avoidable blindness by the year 2020.

OS has also agreed new fees for this service which consist of a Primary Examination covering most contacts with patients, and a Supplementary Examination which may occur in 20% of cases where repeat or additional procedures may be required.

From implementation:

Primary Examination £28.50

Supplementary Examination £18.00

After 1 year:

Primary Examination £36.00

Supplementary Examination £21.00

In addition the SEHD will provide training and accreditation for Volk biomicroscopy, applanation tonometry and visual field examining.

An equipment grant of £8,000 per practice will also be paid to assist Optometrists to provide the new service. The grant will be particularly helpful to equip practices in rural and marginal urban areas. It helps address the problem of health inequality, and assist with the provision of service in areas where it is traditionally uneconomic to do so.

Fees for the following year have still to be agreed, after which an inflationary increase is expected. An annual review will also take account of any technological advances and developments in service delivery.

A few years ago this achievement would have been unthinkable, but close cooperation between all the optical bodies in Scotland and a tireless and enthusiastic OS team have made this possible. The Chairman thanks everyone in Optometry Scotland and the UK national bodies for their help and support.

When the new contract comes into operation it is up to the profession to respond by acting both professionally and ethically, raising the standard of how it operates, providing a more comprehensive service, all to match the significant fee increase commitment from the Scottish Executive Health Department (SEHD) and the NHS. The SEHD has recognised the commitment of Optometrists to the NHS, and addressed the issue of low NHS fees for the increasingly sophisticated service that

Optometry provides. This is a good deal for the patient, the NHS and for hospital waiting times.

OS hopes that when Optometrists sign up to the New Contract they will also sign up to a 1% levy to help OS continue with its work. This is just the beginning and there is still a considerable amount of work to do. OS intends to keep optometry at the forefront of all pertinent healthcare issues.

An increase in activity for optometry practices is expected. Many are already open longer hours than the standard office. As a resource, Optometry is expanding to meet the increasing healthcare role demanded of it, with referrals from GPs, shared care schemes between GPs, Optometrists and Hospitals, delegated care schemes between Ophthalmologists and Optometrists, and the increasing expectation from the patient that the Optometrist will fix any eye problem - and have the time to discuss it with them.

The Interim Report of the Review of Eyecare Services is a comprehensive review of all aspects of eyecare delivery in Scotland. The Review has considered a patient centred approach to redesigning services, and has included the Centre for Change & Innovation (CCI) Ophthalmology Care Pathways. This presents a considerable opportunity for Optometry to further enhance the role of Optometry practices both in the provision of front line care and in chronic disease management.

As part of the Review of Eyecare Services in Scotland, the specific needs of patients living with visual impairment (VI) is being assessed. It is hoped to draft new guidance rules for helping VI patients at an earlier stage, without waiting for formal registration of their disability. This will bring VI patients into contact with specialist services such as low vision care, social care and rehabilitation workers earlier than hitherto, as soon as there is a recognised visual disability.

Community Health Partnerships in Scotland are another consideration. This represents a redesign of all Health and Social Care service provision, improving the interaction between the primary & secondary healthcare teams and social care, and enabling quicker access to information and care than presently exists.

Over the next 2-3 years Optometrists will be able to prescribe an expanded list of medication to help them treat common eye conditions. Further changes such as Independent Prescribing will allow the management of patients without sending them back to the GP for their medication.

Quote from Hal Rollason Chairman of Optometry Scotland.

“Although our colleagues at the Scottish Executive Health Department fought their corner hard, I must give them my gratitude. They have kept an open mind, they have listened to the profession, and together we have delivered a new contract for Optometry that will provide the cornerstone for eyecare in Scotland. Everyone in Scotland will benefit from this service and will be able to access eyecare appropriate to their needs in a setting as close to their home as possible. It will be the pivotal point of a redesigned service working with Ophthalmologists and Orthoptists in Hospital

and GPs and Social Workers in the Community. The new NHS Eye Examination will provide tests that are appropriate to an individual's needs and symptoms. It will not require a mandatory refraction if that is not appropriate, but will provide a funded Supplementary Examination for specified circumstances.

This is a defining moment for Optometry in Scotland, and the profession and the SEHD should be congratulated for taking a major step that will provide fundamental improvements to how eyecare is delivered. Optometry must rise and embrace this challenge. With it we will have a service that is truly world class.”

ENDS

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