OFNC Association of British Dispensing Opticians
Association of Optometrists
British Medical Association
Federation of Ophthalmic and Dispensing Opticians
Optometric Fees Negotiating Committee
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Derek Busby
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Department of Health
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28 April 2014

Dear Derek

GOS Fees 2014-15

Thank you for your letter of 17 April to David Hewlett which sets out your proposed increases for 2014-15 for the sight test and continuing education and training fees, and the pre-registration trainers grant.

As you know, we welcomed the 2% increase in voucher values when it was announced earlier this year; this provides important help for the patients we serve. However we are very disappointed that once again such a low offer on fees has been made. Given the increasing financial pressure on practices, and with many practices having no choice but to close, we cannot accept this offer.

We are also extremely disappointed that there has still been no progress on two very important issues that we had again raised during discussions with NHS England.

Firstly I must express our frustration - and that of the entire eye health and visual impairment sector - that NHS England has not been able to progress the IT bid. This was intended to enable us to link community optical practices, hospitals, GPs and third sector organisations in order to streamline care and achieve improved outcomes for patients. This is key to so much that the Government wants to achieve in terms of improving eye health, maintaining independence, reducing pressures on hospitals and GPs and delivering substantial downstream savings. We expect that this will also be a key theme of the Eye Health Call to Action later this year. We do of course welcome the offer from NHS England to advise on the scope and format of our business case to enable a new bid to be considered in 2015-16, but we regret that this action was not taken during the past year despite overtures from us. Indeed our concern is made all the more acute in light of the fact that substantial IT funds have been made available elsewhere and that we are the only primary care sector never to have received NHS investment in IT despite our willingness to modernise and the clear benefits to patients, the NHS and public health this would bring.

It is also disappointing that our proposals for use of the NHS logo (which exactly mirror those for pharmacy) have once again not been progressed. It is worth repeating that we remain the only primary care profession debarred from using the logo. This seems extremely odd to us when we and NHS England have the common aims of wanting to encourage people to access NHS eye care to

reduce visual impairment and to take pressure off; and when pharmacies, GPs, dentists and hearing care providers in the same premises are able to use the logo.

You asked for comments on the draft payment directions. These draft directions, if implemented, would give effect to the 1% increase you propose. However, as I have said, we believe that we have made a strong case for a higher increase and therefore cannot agree to the increase you propose.

Ann Blackmore
OFNC Secretariat