

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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Chairman: Mike George Secretary: Ann Blackmore

David Roberts Esq
NHS England
Skipton House
80 London Road
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17 April 2015

Dear David

BID FOR GOS FEES, OPTICAL VOUCHERS AND OTHER MATTERS

Please find attached a copy of the finalised minutes of the meeting held between NHS England and members of the OFNC on 23 February.

At that meeting we promised to write to you with our further views on a number of the issues discussed, in particular the prioritisation of items in our bid, given the funding constraints that exist on NHS England. Since that meeting an increase in optical voucher values of 1%, significantly below the 3.5% sought in our bid, has been announced. This has been factored into our reply below.

Clearly the priority must be to achieve a fair increase in the sight test fee. This service is an essential part of primary care, delivered to a high quality and extremely cost efficiently by our members. However, as we made clear in our submission and at the meeting, the sight test fee is intended to cover both staff costs and operational costs, but for many years now it has failed to do so. There has been no proper recognition of the increase in direct costs faced by our members, the additional time and equipment needed as the content and scope of the sight test itself has changed over time, nor the increased administrative and regulatory burdens placed upon practitioners and practices. Our bid for an increase of 2.5% would in no way make up this longstanding shortfall, but it would help to arrest it and would provide an important signal to our members that the value of the important service they provide is recognised. This is particularly important as we move to deliver the aims of the Five Year Forward View.

Indeed, if the optical sector is to play its full part in delivering more primary care in the community, thus reducing pressures and costs on other parts of the NHS, then in our view it is also essential that NHS England fully supports the remaining elements of our bid - the continuing education and training (CET) grant, the training grant to employers for pre-registration optometrists and the IT bid. The two training grants are relatively small amounts of money when taken in any context, but they provide critical support for the development of the profession and in turn the delivery of more primary eye care in the community. The support we are seeking with the IT bid, while larger, is again tiny in terms of government support for IT infrastructure across the health sector. But it will be crucial if the Government's objective of a paperless NHS, including e-referrals, is to be achieved.

While we recognise the constraints on the NHS budget, we believe it would be wrong when considering our bid not to take into account the added value that is already delivered by optical practitioners to the NHS and will be as the Five Year Forward View is implemented, and the costs that could and should be taken out of the NHS if properly integrated IT is supported for eye health providers and the inefficiencies in the contracting process we outlined during our meeting are addressed.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Copies of this letter go to the Earl Howe, Minister for Quality, Peter Howitt and Derek Busby at the Department of Health and David Geddes and Andrew Laycock at NHS England.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ann Blackmore', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ann Blackmore
Secretary, OFNC