

OFNC March 2016 – Press Release

Government Freezes Sight Test Fees

The Government has today announced its intention to freeze NHS sight test fees in England at 2015-16 levels for 2016-17. The continuing education & training (CET) grant will however increase by 1% and the grant to train pre-registration optometrists by 1%.

The government has also announced an increase in patient voucher values for 2016-17 of 1%.

Mike George, Chair of the Optometric Fees Negotiating Committee said:

“This is a heavy and extremely disappointing blow to a profession that has always supported and embraced reform and modernisation. It will be a bitter blow to many and we may see essential local services disappearing as a result.

As a sector we are playing – and continue to play – key roles in the NHS England *Five Year Forward View* plans to transfer care to the community to take pressure off GPs, A&E and hospitals, as well as in the Government’s devolution plans. And yet once again it seems that those who deliver fully against contracts are penalised whilst those who do not are rewarded.

At the Department of Health Eye Health Forum last week, optical leaders heard that our request for IT connectivity assistance was still being considered. Let us hope that at least this plea will be heard”.

He added: “The only positive note is that optical vouchers will increase by 1% at least benefiting patients a little.”

Ann Blackmore, OFNC Secretary said: “It is frustrating that, despite our repeated explanations over several years that the fee covers the cost of the sight test and is not simply pay related, the Government persists in erroneously connecting the fee to increasing optometrist recruitment.

There is no way we can advise the profession to accept such an offer which is clearly not in the best interests of patients. But past experience suggests the government will impose it on us in any case.”

It is anticipated that the new fees and grants will come into effect on Monday 4 April.

ENDS

Notes for editors:

1. The Optometric Fees Negotiating Committee (OFNC) is the community eye health equivalent of the BMA's and BDA's General Practice Committees and community pharmacist's pharmaceutical services negotiating committee (PSNC). It is the recognised negotiating body for fees for the professions. Its members include the ABDO, the AOP, the BMA, and FODO.
2. The Chair and secretariat to the OFNC are provided by AOP and FODO on a rotational basis. Mike George (AOP) has changed places with Claire Slade (FODO) as Chair of OFNC for the next two years. Ann Blackmore (of FODO) replaced Richard Carswell (AOP) as OFNC secretary, when the latter retired on 31 March 2014. In addition, Brian Carroll has retired this year from OFNC (FODO) after many years battling for fair fees for the professions. He is replaced by Richard Edwards (FODO).
3. The current membership of OFNC is Mike George (Optometrist, AOP – Chair OFNC), Henrietta Alderman (AOP CEO), Richard Edwards (Optometrist, FODO), Claire Slade (Optometrist, FODO), Trevor Warburton (Optometrist AOP), Gordon Ilett (AOP), Simon Longstaff (OMP BMA), John Maingay (BMA), Professor Nagasumbramanian (OMP BMA), Sir Anthony Garrett (CEO ABDO), David Hewlett (CEO FODO). Secretary: Ann Blackmore (FODO).
4. Each negotiating year starts with a strategy planning day. The next will be in August 2016. OFNC is always grateful to receive comments, advice and perspectives from Optical Confederation members and can be contacted via Ann@fodo.com.
5. Papers relating to the 2016-17 fees negotiations round are available at <http://www.opticalconfederation.org.uk/resources/ofnc>