



THE COLLEGE  
OF OPTOMETRISTS



## **RCGP Inquiry into Patient Centred Care in the 21st Century – Call for evidence**

### **College of Optometrists and Optical Confederation response**

Sight loss, defined as partial sight or blindness in the better-seeing eye, affects people of all ages, but especially older people: 1 in 5 people aged 75 and 1 in 2 aged 90 and over are living with sight loss<sup>1</sup>. In our ageing population, this represents a huge percentage of NHS service users.

We believe that general medical practice should remain the clinical hub and heart of care and support in the community. However, to support people living with sight loss, faced with the major challenges of demography and funding, we need to develop a new type of clinically collaborative and integrated primary care, with networks and pathways that span the front lines. Despite NHS England's new commitment to ensuring increased numbers of GPs, the service will undoubtedly remain stretched unless we engage the whole of primary care in a more cohesive way to support both individuals and communities.

Optometrists and opticians have the necessary skills and are ready to provide a far wider range of eye health services with easier community-based access, usually at lower cost than secondary care. This could reduce pressures on GPs and also on the system as a whole. However, there remains a fundamental need for optometrists to be linked via IT to other NHS professionals. Providing integrated networks of care with the right patient information accessible at the right time is essential to capture, audit and improve outcomes.

We are currently compiling our sector response to NHS England's "Call to Action for Eye Health" - due for submission on 12 September – where the points raised above will be detailed in greater depth.

We have also circulated this call for evidence to the patient reference group hosted by the College of Optometrists and have received helpful feedback on GP services generally as well as a suggestion for primary care delivery that is patient-centred:

*"My local models of care seem to be fashioned around existing practices locally, which may be good or seriously deficient. There seems to be insufficient mutual and speedy learning of how to effect change promptly and efficiently within practices. Also the emphasis is on the 'walking wounded' and 'healthy worried'. Practices should have set times to focus on those with multiple disabilities/longterm conditions. eg clinic times specifically for that group of patients who need extra help to access GP health services. Ideally, such clinics should also have optician/optometrist on site*

at the same time”.

*“To achieve better outcomes: more home visits for the most severely multi-disabled patients; augmented with regular checkups tailored to the needs of each patient”. I also suggest the use of 'cluster clinics' - setting aside half a day or specific hours a week (or fortnight) for the delivery of specific, targeted health care/screening/follow up for certain types of problems, including dementia, sight loss, multiple disability groups who could be overlooked by GPs working on 10 minute appointments mixed in with all other patients. Maybe use carer profiling to identify and cluster such patient groups and deliver health care accordingly?”*

One example of patient-centred care came from a member of the group working with the charity SeeAbility on implementing a pilot of the LOCSU Community Eye Care Pathway for Adults & Young People with Learning Disabilities in three West London boroughs.

This pathway identifies appropriate community eye care services for patients, uses accessible information and provides care tailored specifically to the needs of the patient. It is felt that this model could be replicated in general practice. Below is a summary of the mechanics of the initiative, how it draws upon community resources and is focused solely on the needs of the patient:

- People with learning disabilities are 10 times more likely to have serious sight problems than other people. Despite this, people with learning disabilities face many barriers in accessing eye care services including:
  - Carers not understanding why eye care is important for someone with learning disabilities
  - Carers believing that it is impossible to carry out an eye test with someone with learning disabilities
  - Carers often being unsure which optometrist or health professional is best able to meet the needs of the person with learning disabilities they support
- The LOCSU eye care pathway helps to address these barriers by:
  - Identifying local community eye care services that can meet the eye care needs of people with learning disabilities
  - Supplying a pre-eye test questionnaire to be completed about the patient and given to the optometrist to inform the eye test itself
  - Introducing a system which allows the optometrist sufficient time to complete a successful eye test, making Reasonable Adjustments where necessary including the use of picture tests as an alternative to the Snellen Chart where required
  - Producing an easy read report from the optometrist to explain the outcomes of the eye test to the patient
  - Establishing a coherent pathway which directs patients to optical services that can meet their needs and reduces unnecessary visits that cannot meet their needs to GPs (for signposting) and hospital eye clinics (when the patient could be treated just as easily by a community optometrist).

We hope that you find this helpful.

**About us:**

The College of Optometrists is the professional membership body for optometry. With over 14000 members, the College is dedicated to maintaining the highest levels of eye care, ethical standards and customer service by supporting optometrists throughout their careers – from undergraduates to those working at the highest professional levels.

The Optical Confederation represents the 12,000 optometrists, the 6,000 dispensing opticians, and 7,000 optical businesses and 45,000 ancillary staff in the UK, who provide high quality and accessible eye care services to the whole population. The Confederation is a coalition of five optical representative bodies: the Association of British Dispensing Opticians (ABDO), the Association of Contact Lens Manufacturers (ACLM), the Association of Optometrists (AOP), the Federation of Manufacturing Opticians (FMO) and the Federation of Opticians (FODO). As a Confederation, we work with others to improve eye health for the public good.

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<sup>i</sup> *Access Economics (2009) Future Sight Loss (1): The economic impact of partial sight and blindness in the UK adult population*