

## **World Antibiotic Awareness Week – Westminster Hall Debate**

### **Optical Confederation Briefing**

#### **The role of optometrists**

Optometrists in Wales and Scotland and increasingly in England and Northern Ireland are funded by the NHS to see patients with eye conditions such as conjunctivitis, abrasions and other irritable or painful complaints. They have access to two antibiotics as standard to help treat these conditions, and some optometrists have access to more as a result of Independent Prescribing qualifications.

#### **Key messages**

##### **1) Optometrists use fewer antibiotics than other clinicians treating eye problems**

Optometrists are often more efficient prescribers than clinicians working in hospitals and GP surgeries and have been shown to prescribe antibiotics on fewer occasions, as well as opting for over-the-counter alternatives on a more regular basis. In contrast CCG prescribing data suggests an increasing trend for GPs to prescribe anti-infective agents for eye conditions. This is possibly due to a lack of capacity in general practice and a lack of specialist equipment, such as slit lamp bio-microscopes.

##### **2) Community optical practices need to be promoted as the first port of call for people with eye health problems.**

NHS England has recognised the need to move eye care out of hospitals and GP surgeries and into community eye care services. This will allow the Hospital Eye Service (HES) to concentrate on urgent conditions, while optometrists can use their training to manage a range of non-sight threatening eye conditions, as has been the case in Scotland and Wales for a number of years.

It is estimated that 78% of attendances for eye care could be managed better, more quickly and at lower cost if comprehensive primary eye care services were commissioned from community optometry.

##### **3) Moving more care into community eye care and updating the range of medicines to optometrists would improve patient care and reduce unnecessary prescribing.**

A limited range of therapeutic drugs is currently available to optometrists. The optical sector is currently consulting on a regulation change that would provide an expanded formulary. This will enable easier, cheaper and more appropriate examination and treatment of patients who present with eye complaints. This will save money, prevent the overuse of antibiotics and reduce the burden on general practice.