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To: Optical practices holding a general ophthalmic services (GOS) contract

Cc: Regional optical commissioning leads

17 June 2020

Dear colleague

## **Resumption of optical services in England**

Thank you for your contribution through the peak pandemic period and your continued commitment to supporting the national response.

On 1 April 2020 we wrote to NHS optical practices setting out immediate changes to services due to the overriding need to limit transmission of COVID-19. These included:

- suspending all routine services
- delivering urgent and essential eye care from a limited number of sites.

We are very grateful to the clinicians and professionals who have risen to the challenge by adapting services to provide remote triage and consultations, and to those who contributed to the rapid development and implementation of the COVID-19 urgent eyecare service (CUES) where commissioned by local clinical commissioning groups (CCGs).

This letter sets out the next steps for delivery of NHS optical services in England, as the NHS moves into the second phase of the COVID-19 response.

### **Resumption of services**

Government guidance allows retail premises to re-open from 15 June. It is therefore now appropriate to enable optical premises to commence re-opening and for practices to begin the resumption of provision of GOS services.

Working with professional representative groups, we have consensus on the ambition to commence reopening services. We support the full resumption of routine GOS services in a way that is safe, and where practices assess that they have the

necessary infection prevention and control (IPC) and personal protective equipment (PPE) requirements in place.

Progression to resumption of the full range of routine eye care will be risk-managed by the individual practice and can include sight tests. It is important that practices take steps to ensure that they are able to adhere to the necessary IPC and PPE requirements. Optical practices are now able to register with a wider range of wholesale suppliers to ensure that they have the appropriate PPE to deliver services. Details of wholesalers who have confirmed they have sufficient relevant PPE in stock is available at <https://www.aop.org.uk/coronavirus-updates/ppe-suppliers> and further support for ordering PPE has been provided by <https://primaryeyecaresupplies.co.uk>

The advice of NHS England and NHS Improvement is that the sequencing and scheduling of patients for treatment as services resume should consider:

- the urgency of needs
- the particular unmet needs of vulnerable groups
- available capacity to undertake activity.

We are supporting the resumption of services with the publication of [a standard operating procedure for optometry](#).

Adaptations will be required to provide routine eye care in a social distancing environment, and where possible, remote consultations should continue to be available to triage symptoms.

We support the guidance released by the College of Optometrists that sets out ways in which practices should be adapted in the current circumstances. This can be found here: <https://www.college-optometrists.org/the-college/media-hub/news-listing/coronavirus-2019-advice-for-optometrists.html>

Optical practices should also take steps to risk assess their workforce and take commensurate actions.

There also remains a need to be able to respond to any local or national re-imposition of public health measures should they arise.

**Financial and contractual arrangements**

NHS England and NHS Improvement will cease the current temporary contract arrangements at 30 June 2020. We will work with the Optical Fees Negotiation Committee (OFNC) to confirm financial arrangements as we begin to bring back services and to provide reimbursement for GOS forms submitted from 1 July 2020.

We will also agree with the OFNC an appropriate variable cost abatement rate for the period to 30 June 2020 for those optical services paid at average monthly rates.

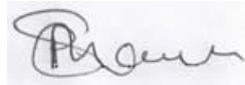
Thank you for your commitment and understanding of the complex challenges we have collectively navigated in meeting the COVID-19 public health requirements, maintaining safety and access to care for patients, and the safety of the optical workforce.

Your co-operation throughout this difficult period continues to be recognised and appreciated.

Kind regards



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