

REPORT TO HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

31 JANUARY 2023

Update on Eye Health Clinical Programme Group (CPG)

The mission of the eye health CPG is to provide a holistic approach to transform, integrate and lead on the development of Eye Health services in the county. The CPG aims to ensure patients receive the best experience by prioritising service user involvement and service quality, improving delivery of service and utilising public health intelligence to reduce variation.

The membership of the CPG include people with lived experience of visual impairment, organisations representing and providing services to people with a visual impairment, Gloucestershire ICB (GICB), Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (GHNHSFT), community optometry and the independent sector.

At the beginning of the year the eye health CPG worked together to produce a 3-year strategy for eye health in Gloucestershire. The strategy has agreed aims, and the activity needed to achieve those aims.

To support these aims we have developed 3 themes, Reducing Inequalities, Digital Transformation and Investing in our Workforce.

Reducing Inequalities

The CPG have developed two project areas to support the most vulnerable in our county.

Homeless Eyecare service

In partnership with the Gloucester City Mission and the charity Vision Care for Homeless we have established a weekly eye care clinic at the Mission. This service is entirely staffed by a volunteer rota of community optometrists and optician support staff. The clinic sees not just homeless people but anyone in sheltered accommodation and the refugee population.

Often homeless people are not entitled to a free eye test and even if they are, would not access a high street optician due to the fear of the cost associated with purchasing spectacles. The majority of people seen in the clinic have not accessed a sight test for over 10 years. To date, 42 people have been seen in clinic and 81% needed spectacles which the clinic has been able to provide free of charge.

In addition to this homeless people are known to have a higher eye care needs than the general population and 14% of the people seen in clinic have needed an onward referral into secondary care eye care services. The Ophthalmology Department at GHNHSFT have supported the charity in being able to make urgent referrals into the service.

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The provision of spectacles will have implications for homeless people's safety, their ability to access benefits and their ability to take medication correctly to name just a few of the wider benefits of this service.

Care of the Elderly (COTE) Ward Eye Care Liaison Officer (ECLO)

The ICB have commissioned an ECLO in the outpatient departments at GHNHSFT for many years. ECLOs act as an important bridge between health and social services and are central to the support and wellbeing of patients in eye clinics. They also help prevent avoidable sight loss, by talking through treatment and helping people to understand their medication if necessary. They will also help patients access local services, support with access to the correct benefits and provision of aids and adaptations.

ECLOs are common in outpatient departments but are not accessible to inpatients on wards. Last year, the RNIB who provide our ECLO service and the ophthalmology and care of the elderly teams at GHNHSFT decided to pilot a project to provide ECLO support to the COTE wards within GHNHSFT. The pilot showed that up to 25% of patients on COTE wards had unmet eye health needs that had either impacted the admission or was delaying the discharge. The patients unmet eye health needs were having a significant impact on their daily living and ability to live independently.

Following the results of the pilot the ICB commissioned the RNIB to provide ECLO support to the COTE wards at Gloucester and Cheltenham. Of the patients seen to date, 27% have needed further support with either provision of spectacles, emotional support, aids and adaptations or onward referral. GHNHSFT have made urgent provision to be able to provide spectacles to inpatients or see them in the relevant clinic so that the patients discharge is supported, and they are not discharged without a plan in place for their eye health needs.

Digital Transformation

Community Ophthalmic Link

Gloucestershire is the first area in the country to support the community optometrists with access to hospital eye images, data and referral information. The project is managed collaboratively between the ICB, the Ophthalmology department at GHNHSFT and the Local Optical Committee (LOC).

High street opticians are often the first port of call for patients experiencing eye care issues. The ICB already commissions several services from community optometrists on the high street, such as the urgent eye care service which was set up during covid for sudden onset eye problems such as flashes, floaters, vision loss or minor eye injuries. However, community optometrists do not hold a record of the patient in

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the same way a GP would, even when they make a referral into secondary care, they do not receive information on the outcome of that referral. This often means that the default position for a community optometrist is to make a referral to hospital services.

National funding was secured to give all community optometrists in Gloucestershire access to secondary care data and images in order to understand the patients eye care history. There are currently only 2 practices in the county that do not have access to the system, with at least one more due to come on line shortly.

Optometrists are reporting a reduction in referrals to hospital for patients who can be managed in the community, access to the information improving the care of patients in the community and for those patients who still require a referral, that access to the patient's history is ensuring they are referred to the right place, first time.

This digital connection between high street optometrists and secondary eye care services not only provides better care now but will allow us to look for more opportunities to provide eye care on the high street, reducing travel, increasing access and providing more care closer to home.

Investing in our Workforce

An important part of realising the ambition to provide more care closer to home is ensuring that we have a highly skilled workforce in the community.

Higher Education for community optometrists

The Eye Health CPG was able to access funding from Health Education England (HEE) this year to support community optometrists with higher education. We are supporting 37 community optometrists with access to qualifications in low vision, medical retina, glaucoma and independent prescribing. This will mean we can look for opportunities for shared care with the hospital, meaning more patients can be cared for closer to their homes by appropriately qualified professionals. This is especially important within eye care, as it tends to be an as the majority of people with a visual impairment are older people who may find it harder to travel without support.

Raising Awareness of Visual Impairment

As noted earlier, the CPG places great emphasis on ensuring the voice of people with lived experience and awareness of their issues is central to our work. To this end, the CPG has supported work to raise awareness of visual impairment across primary and secondary services. A pilot vi awareness training session for primary care was undertaken in April, and visual impairment awareness information has been placed on the primary care intranet. The CPG played an active part in ensuring

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the first South-West eye health patient summit that took place in November was entirely organised and led by people with a lived experience.

The Eye Health CPG is keen to continue to innovate and advocate for eye health issues and will continue to look for opportunities to improve eye care for the residents of Gloucestershire.