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CHIEF OPTOMETRIC ADVISOR LETTER TO COMMUNITY EYECARE SECTOR

Dear Colleagues

We are now well into 2022 and the COVID-19 pandemic is still dominating our lives. Thankfully restrictions are slowly lifting and we are learning to live with the virus. It therefore seems timely to highlight some of the exciting developments that are happening this year, and also those being planned for the not too distant future.

On 1 July 2022, General Ophthalmic Services will be changed to fund an extended role for independent prescriber (IP) community optometrists, managing patients with more complex anterior eye conditions who either self-present or are referred from another optometrist. This will help ensure fewer patients need a referral to the hospital eye service (HES) and care is delivered safely closer to home. Further information on this will be outlined via a PCA circular later in the spring.

The Community Glaucoma Service will also start to roll out this year, supporting the HES to discharge their lowest risk glaucoma and treated ocular hypertension patients to the management of accredited IP optometrists. It offers a sustainable solution to caring for patients with chronic ocular conditions, and utilises the skills and experience of many colleagues. Early discussions with patients could not have been more encouraging about their trust and confidence in their community optometrist; testament to the professionalism of colleagues and their practice teams.

In addition, planning for a national Low Vision Service is well underway and will again give the opportunity for more patients to receive community based care. The service is expected to begin in April 2023. The clinical skills of accredited dispensing opticians and optometrists will be required to deliver this service, enabling easy access to low vision aids, for all those in need. On-going support for patients will also be a key part of the service and ensuring that they are correctly signposted to other local care provision will be important.

You may also be aware that the General Optical Council (GOC) has been reviewing our professional education. This will have significant implications for the way that optometrists are trained, with a view to supporting our more clinical roles. The Scottish Government is working with Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) and the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) as they develop a new undergraduate optometry course. This will involve incorporating the pre-registration year and independent prescribing as part of a five-year Master's degree, with the first students enrolling in 2024.



We've asked NHS Education for Scotland (NES) to support these universities to develop the clinical experience, in collaboration with the profession. As part of this project, NES are keen to hear your views and experience. I would please urge you to contribute to this process. They are aiming to ensure representation across the whole profession which will help to inform proposals for the new models of clinical training and experience. Further information on these focus groups can be found [via this link](#).

As they have been for many years, the pre-registration trainee supervisors will be key to the success of any new placements. There will also be the opportunity for many others to get involved in the next few years too, and share their skills and knowledge with new members of the profession; it is an exciting prospect.

Whilst there is a lot to look forward to, the impact of the last two years should not be underestimated. If you do need some support, resources are available for you at [Home - National Wellbeing Hub for those working in Health and Social Care](#) and don't hesitate to seek further help if it's required.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to remind you about the existence of the [Eyes.Scot website](#). It launched in August 2021 and is Scotland's national website for eye care services and eye health information, both for the public and professionals. The website is still being developed with exciting plans for further upgrades (including the NHS Board pages), but in the meantime I'd encourage you to visit. If you have any feedback on the website please send it to the Scottish Government's Community Eyecare team at: eyecare@gov.scot.

Thank you again for all your efforts in continuing to provide high quality and safe care to your patients.

Best wishes



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