OPTICAL BODIES' STATEMENT

IT CONNECTIVITY FOR EYE CARE SERVICES IN ENGLAND

The national optical bodies fully support two-way IT connectivity between primary eye care and the rest of the NHS, particularly hospital eye services and GPs, and have been calling for this as a way of improving patient care and safety for over two decades. It is also a key enabler for eye care transformation at all levels.

It is self-evident that this needs to be implemented carefully and in a programmed way to ensure roll out is safe and does not put patients' eye or general health at risk.

The sector has also always been clear about the issue of appropriate NHS investment and funding for IT connectivity, timescales for roll out and ongoing support, as for other primary care sectors.

As such it is essential that system changes consider all eventualities and that by implementing new ways of working, we do not digitally isolate patients or practitioners unnecessarily.

Nothing has yet been agreed nationally on systems, funding, or phasing out or retaining paper referrals. Paper systems currently provide an important safety net in case of IT failure and serve as a back-up to ensure patient safety.

NHS England is however testing proofs-of-concept in a number of sites in England involving either EeRS providers and, more recently, ERS.

Whilst local funding, timescales and arrangements for proof-of-concept sites will ideally be done collaboratively via LOCs (representing all local contractors) there still needs to be national engagement and coordination. Proof-of-concept sites will all be different; some may not be fully streamlined (e.g. double keying), represent optimal systems for wider roll out or reflect full or ongoing costs, all of which will inform national negotiations.

The sector Information and IT Committee seeks to keep all parties informed of progress, any national agreements e.g. including on standards and APIs, lessons learned, options and benefits in order to achieve optimal primary eye care IT connectivity for the benefit of patients and all primary eye care providers in both the short and long-term, and keeps OFNC appraised of contractual and funding implications.

Note to editors

The sector Information and IT Committee is a joint committee of the national optical representative bodies including ABDO, AOP, College of Optometrists, FODO – The Association for Eye Care Providers, OSA, LOCSU, OW, OS, ONI, PMS providers and digital manufacturers. It provides an inclusive forum for anyone in the UK optical sector who has an interest in IT, information, uses of information, data ownership, data security, data standards and systems. It helps the national bodies and the sector in its collective parts formulate strategy, policy and collective actions.

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