



Association of British Dispensing Opticians
Association of Optometrists
British Medical Association
Federation of Ophthalmic and Dispensing Opticians

Optometric Fees Negotiating Committee

16 Upper Woburn Place, London, WC1H 0BS

Chair: Gordon Ilett

Email: david.hewlett@fodo.com

Secretary: David Hewlett

Alette Addison
Deputy Director
Pharmacy & Eye Care Services
Department of Health & Social Care
4th Floor
39 Victoria Street
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20 February 2023

Dear Alette

Thank you for your letter of 16 February setting out sight tests fees and grants for 2023/24 which Ministers have agreed.

Although the letter acknowledges the increasing costs associated with providing NHS eye care over the last year, the profession will be angry and disappointed that the evidence about the actual cost of providing NHS sight tests has been ignored and another real-terms cut imposed.

Each year NHS England asks for evidence but it is not clear how the evidence submitted is reviewed. This year we put forward detailed evidence of significant underfunding and requested a reasonable fee uplift after taking account of pressures on providers and the wider NHS funding position.

We seem to be trapped in the vicious NHS cycle, so common in the acute sector, whereby efficient services like ours are penalised to prop up less efficient services. The NHS should not wait until primary eye care fails, like other services, before it acts as then it will be too late and cost even more to put right.

The 4.5% uplift in context of the evidence and the freeze of the CPD grant suggest 'out of sight is out of mind' and that funding decisions about us are being made without strategic understanding of the sector, by people whom we never see, and signed off by a Minister we have never met.

The current situation is unacceptable and we are formally requesting a meeting with Minister Neil O'Brien to discuss these issues and eye care transformation opportunities in England more generally.

The NHS depends on primary eye care to meet growing eye care need closer to home and to relieve the current pressures on hospital eye services and GPs. There are as yet untapped opportunities to prevent avoidable blindness outside hospital and to agree a better way of handling fees discussions in the future. These can be done in ways that will benefit patients, the NHS and the taxpayer.

One example is IT connectivity which has the potential to unlock major opportunities at all levels, yet scarce NHS resources continue to be wasted on rushed IT projects which all can see are likely to fail. Another example is delivering the NHS priority of direct referral in eye care to reduce pressure on GPs, which we all support, but know the NHS system will not be able to deliver based on its current approach. There is a better way forward and, in taking that, we can reset eye care in England and modernise services, so people do not lose their sight due to delays in hospital care.

We ask for a meeting so that we can reassure the sector that DHSC and NHS England understand the value of primary eye care and that there is a way forward and a basis on which they should continue to show goodwill and help implement much needed reforms to the outpatient model of care. This meeting is urgent as this latest real-terms cut to funding, combined with a major cost-of-living crisis, is impacting practice viability and we are running out of road.

We look forward to hearing from you and to arranging a meeting with the Minister in the near future.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gordon Ilett', with a red circular mark or stamp over the middle of the signature.

Gordon Ilett
Chair