

Dear Colleague

**GENERAL OPHTHALMIC SERVICES (GOS) –  
COVID-19 – Provision of emergency or essential eye  
care during ‘lockdown’; Clarification of financial  
support measures announced in PCA(O)2020(4);  
Emergency dispensing**

**Summary**

1. This communication provides information on the provision of emergency or essential community eye care during the additional COVID-19 social distancing measures announced on Monday 23 March 2020. It also provides clarification of aspects of the financial support measures introduced in PCA(O)2020(4) and an update on emergency dispensing.

**Action**

2. NHS Boards are asked to urgently copy and issue this letter and the enclosed Memorandum to all optometrists, ophthalmic medical practitioners, body corporates and practices within their Board area.

Yours sincerely,



**Heather Campbell**

Interim Deputy Director of Primary Care, Scottish Government

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25 March 2020

**Addresses:**

For action  
Chief Executives, NHS Boards

For information  
Chief Executive,  
NHS National Services  
Scotland  
NHS Board Optometric  
Advisers  
NHS Education for Scotland  
Optometry Scotland

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**Enquiries to:**

Community Eyecare Policy  
Primary Care Division  
1st Floor East Rear  
St Andrews House  
EDINBURGH  
EH1 3DG

Email: [eyecare@gov.scot](mailto:eyecare@gov.scot)

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**MEMORANDUM TO NHS:  
PCA(O)2020(5)**

**Summary**

1. This Memorandum provides a further important update to all community optometry practices and staff regarding the provision of community eye care services during the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. It includes:
  - information on the provision of emergency and essential community eye care services, further to the additional social distancing measures announced on 23 March 2020;
  - clarification of the financial support measures announced in PCA(O)2020(4): retention of optometrists and ophthalmic medical practitioners (OMPs) by practice owners during the financial support period as a condition of payment, and payment claims for telephone appointments undertaken by Independent Prescriber (IP) optometrists;
  - an update on emergency dispensing.

**Provision of emergency or essential eye care during 'lockdown'**

*Community optometry practices in Scotland providing emergency or essential eye care permitted to remain open during 'lockdown'*

3. On Monday 23 March 2020 the UK Government and Scottish Government announced further social distancing measures considered to be necessary to slow the spread of COVID-19. As part of these additional social distancing measures, the UK Government published an initial list of further non-essential businesses and premises which were required to close, and exceptions within specific categories.
4. The position of community optometry practices in relation to that initial list was unclear. **The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport has confirmed that community optometry practices in Scotland which are providing emergency or essential eye care services under arrangements agreed with local NHS Boards can remain open.** The UK Government has also published an updated list on Wednesday 25 March 2020 explicitly stating that opticians are permitted to remain open: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/further-businesses-and-premises-to-close/further-businesses-and-premises-to-close-guidance>.
5. In developing and implementing these local arrangements for the provision of emergency and essential eye care services, NHS Boards are asked to take cognisance of the speed with which change is occurring in relation to this pandemic. Boards are therefore asked to consider the option of community optometry practice 'clusters', which may help to reduce the number of practices required to remain open whilst still providing sufficient geographical cover of services within the Board area.

Telephone triaging, referrals to IP optometrists, notification to NHS Boards regarding changes to practice opening hours and closures

6. All community optometry practices remaining open to provide emergency or essential eye care under arrangements agreed with local NHS Boards must have a clear process in place for triaging patients by telephone. If the optometrist within the practice is not an IP, there must be a mechanism by which the patient can be triaged to an IP optometrist within their locality.
7. In order to ensure the effectiveness of local emergency and essential eye care pathways, it is vital that all community optometry practices provide their relevant territorial Health Board with clear and up-to-date information on the provision of services by their practice and any changes to the practice opening hours which are to be in place for the foreseeable future.
8. Where a practice has taken the decision to close their practice as a result of the additional social distancing measures announced on 23 March 2020, arrangements must be put in place (e.g. via the practice's telephone answering system) to provide clear signposting to one or more other local practices which are continuing to provide emergency or essential eye care, and where a patient can access emergency dispensing services.

**Clarification of financial support measures announced in PCA(O)2020(4)**

Retention of optometrists/OMPs by practice owners during financial support period

9. [PCA\(O\)2020\(4\)](#) outlined the provision of financial support payments for community optometry practices in order to preserve the integrity of NHS community eyecare services both throughout the current COVID-19 outbreak and afterwards. As previously stated, community optometry practices and staff are key to the delivery of eye care in Scotland and the Scottish Government's wider reform agenda. It is therefore imperative that, as far as possible, the current infrastructure and workforce are protected.
10. All practice owners (whether or not an optometrist, ophthalmic medical practitioner (OMP), bodies corporate or lay person) are advised that, in order for practices to remain eligible for this financial support, there must be **no amendments to the information held on the relevant NHS Board's Ophthalmic List** during the financial support period - except where there is a change to the practice's opening hours or where the practice is closing permanently.
11. Optometrists/OMPs **must** advise their local NHS Board if they have been dismissed by a practice owner whilst the current financial support measures are in place. Where Boards have determined, following receipt of this notification, that there is no longer a contractor associated with the practice, they will notify Practitioner and Counter Fraud Services (P&CFS) who will cease financial support payments to the practice with immediate effect.

*Payment claims for telephone consultations undertaken by optometrists/OMPs*

12. During the COVID19 pandemic an optometrist or OMP may feel that it is appropriate, and in the patient's best interest, to conduct a consultation by telephone. The GOC has provided advice about undertaking remote consultations and prescribing.

([https://www.optical.org/filemanager/root/site\\_assets/publications/covid\\_19/High-level-principles-for-remote-prescribing\\_.pdf](https://www.optical.org/filemanager/root/site_assets/publications/covid_19/High-level-principles-for-remote-prescribing_.pdf)).

13. This consultation can be claimed via eOphthalmic under a 2.8 or 4.8 reason code. This does not include a normal triage call and will be subject to payment verification in the usual way.

**Emergency dispensing**

14. Emergency dispensing should **only take place** in instances where delaying the provision of spectacles would be detrimental to a patient's sight or wellbeing. In addition, key workers must have access to dispensing services should their existing spectacles be lost or broken.

15. In deciding whether to undertake emergency dispensing, a practice should discuss with the patient all alternative options that may be possible e.g. temporary repairs.

**Enquiries**

16. Any practice-specific queries about the financial support measures should be emailed to P&CFS at:

[nss.psdgospayments-covid19@nhs.net](mailto:nss.psdgospayments-covid19@nhs.net).

17. Any other enquiries arising from this Memorandum should be emailed to:

[eyecare@gov.scot](mailto:eyecare@gov.scot).

Primary Care Division,  
Directorate for Community Health and Social Care  
Scottish Government