

Agenda Item 30

Public Question on Eye Testing for Older People

1. Introduction

The HOSC on July 23rd received the following question from the Older People's Council. The HOSC asked the PCT to respond to the questions at this meeting.

"The Older People's Council (OPC) is concerned that some older people in the city are not able to easily access the free eye testing to which they are entitled. Recognising the importance of maintaining good eyesight for the promotion of wellbeing and independence, the OPC would like to ask the Primary Care Trust (PCT):

1. How does the PCT promote free eye testing for older people and how does it monitor its delivery by local opticians?
2. What has been the take-up of free tests for each year over the past 5 years, identifying those older people who are:
 - aged 60+ exercising their right to a bi-annual free test;
 - aged 60 + receiving more frequent free eye tests on the recommendation of their optometrist;
 - aged 70+ exercising their right to an annual free test;
 - aged 70 + receiving more frequent free eye tests on the recommendation of their optometrist?
3. How does the city compare nationally, regionally and with comparator cities in respect of free eye testing? (Please provide figures for the same time-frame and for the same categories as requested in 2 above.)
4. Some older people have said that they feel they have been placed under pressure to purchase spectacles etc. when visiting an optician for their free eye test. Can the PCT detail the steps it takes to ensure that city opticians do not inappropriately use free eye testing sessions to push for sales?"

2. Background information

Optician is a general term that covers both optometrists and dispensing opticians.

Optometrists carry out sight tests to check the quality of vision and eye health. They look for signs of eye disease which may need treatment from a doctor or eye surgeon and prescribe and fit glasses and contact lenses. When visiting an

optician, patients may have a sight test carried out by an optometrist or an ophthalmic medical practitioner. They are trained to recognise abnormalities and diseases in the eye, such as cataract and glaucoma. After the sight test, the optician will give each patient a statement (prescription) and, if glasses are required, may offer to fit spectacles or contact lenses.

Dispensing opticians fit glasses and contact lenses, but do not test eyes. They can give you advice on types of lens, such as single-vision or bifocal, and help patients to choose frames.

The majority of optometrists are self employed or work for larger organisations. In order to practice as an Optometrist they must be on the PCTs local approved provider list.

3. Questions from the Older People's Council

3.1 How does the PCT promote free eye testing for older people and how does it monitor its delivery by local opticians?

All opticians are required to promote free eye tests and should display posters to this effect.

General Ophthalmic Service's contracts are the legal form for a contract to provide any primary ophthalmic service. The framework comprises three levels, which are referred to as mandatory, additional and enhanced. Mandatory services are the sight testing service when carried out at a practice. All PCTs must provide for this service and any provider with a contract for mandatory services must provide NHS funded sight tests from a practice. Additional services are laid down in regulations and must be provided by all PCTs. Some providers of additional services may also be providers of mandatory services, but this is not a requirement. The only additional service that has been prescribed in the regulations is mobile services i.e. provision of NHS funded sight tests at day centres, residential care homes and individuals' own homes. Enhanced services are any other primary ophthalmic services commissioned at the discretion of PCTs. to meet what they consider necessary primary ophthalmic services in their areas.

Brighton & Hove PCT has a range of enhanced services:

- Primary Open Angle Glaucoma (P.O.A.G.).
- Age-related macular degeneration (AMD).
- Diabetic Retinopathy.
- Cataract Referral

The regulatory body for optometrists is the College of Optometrists who set exams and provide guidelines for how optometrists operate. Optometrists are

registered with the General Ophthalmic Council (GOC). The PCT reviews local delivery of services and poor performance is dealt with through the PCTs clinical support processes.

3.2 What has been the take-up of free tests for each year over the past 5 years, identifying those older people who are:

- **aged 60+ exercising their right to a bi-annual free test;**
- **aged 60 + receiving more frequent free eye tests on the recommendation of their optometrist;**
- **aged 70+ exercising their right to an annual free test;**
- **aged 70 + receiving more frequent free eye tests on the recommendation of their optometrist?**

The PCT does not routinely collect this information and at the time of writing this report, it was not possible to obtain the data requested.

3.3 How does the city compare nationally, regionally and with comparator cities in respect of free eye testing? (Please provide figures for the same time-frame and for the same categories as requested in 2 above.)

The PCT does not collect this information and as above, it was not possible to obtain this data.

3.4 Some older people have said that they feel they have been placed under pressure to purchase spectacles etc. when visiting an optician for their free eye test. Can the PCT detail the steps it takes to ensure that city opticians do not inappropriately use free eye testing sessions to push for sales?"

Patients have a statutory right to take their prescription wherever they like for dispensing. The PCT were concerned that some older people have reported that they feel they have been placed under pressure to purchase spectacles. No complaints or enquiries through the Patient Advice and Liaison Service have been received about this issue.

4. Recommendation

1. Where there are specific concerns about pressure being placed on older people to buy spectacles, these are reported to the PCTs Patient Advice and Liaison Service.
2. The PCT will consider how it can best ensure that people are aware that they can get free eye testing.
3. The PCT will consider what information it needs to collect in relation to sight testing as part of it's contract review process.

