

To: London LOC Chairs
All London Optometrists

NHS North East London ICB
4th Floor, UNEX Tower
5 Station Street
Stratford
London
E15 1DA

cc. London Ophthalmology and Eye Care
Board members

12 July 2024

Dear colleagues

Re: Optometry referral patterns and offer of choice to patients

You may be aware that the Director of Commissioning in Devon recently wrote to the Chair of Devon LOC regarding optometry referral patterns and patient choice (letter attached). You will also be aware that similar concerns have been repeatedly raised by members at the London Ophthalmology and Eye Care Board in relation to current referral practices for the provision of ophthalmology services, particularly cataract surgery. Whilst the London commissioners and NHS London Clinical Director are notified each week of examples of poor practice, it has been difficult to gather the data to establish the extent of this problem. We are sure that the vast majority of our optometrists are aware of best practice standards, and we acknowledge the positive working relationships we see in London between primary and secondary care.

However, considering the discussion raised by the Devon letter, we would be grateful if you would remind your members of the standards expected, highlighting the following points:

- 1) A provider operating under the GOS contract, when making a decision to refer a patient for NHS services, must do so without regard to its own financial interest and ensure that patient choice conversations are carried out. This is confirmed by the General Optical Council Joint Statement on Conflict of Interest, which sets out the Council's expectation that professionals should avoid, declare and manage actual or potential conflicts of interest across healthcare settings.
- 2) The legal right to a choice of 5 providers applies to referrals made by optometrists as well as GPs (as described in [section 3 of the NHS Choice Framework](#) and set out in [legislation](#)). The [General Ophthalmic Contract](#) requires optometrists to "comply with

all relevant legislation and have regard to all relevant guidance issued by NHS England or the Secretary of State”.

- 3) The provider obligations in the GOS contract include a specific contractual requirement to ensure patients are not misled about the availability of services.

The London Ophthalmology and Eye Care Board have strongly recommended that each ICB communicates accurate waiting times for cataract surgery at their sites to allow primary care colleagues to be correctly informed.

Thank you for your on-going support in ensuring best practice standards are applied for the benefit of all Londoners.

Yours faithfully



Jeremy Wallman

Head of Primary Care Commissioning; Dentistry, Optometry and Pharmacy

On behalf of:

NHS North East London ICB

NHS North West London ICB

NHS North Central London ICB

NHS South East London ICB

NHS South West London ICB

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