



SUFFOLK OPTOMETRIC DIRECT REFERRAL SCHEME

PROTOCOL

Traditionally, when an Optometrist detects during an eye examination injury or disease of the eye, the patient is referred to the General Medical Practitioner (GP), as part of the Optometrists responsibility under the NHS Terms of Service and/or Eye Examination Regulations. The Rules relating to Injury and Disease of the Eye 1999 gave the Optometrist more discretion to decide whom to refer to the GP.

When a patient with an ophthalmic problem consults a GP on the advice of the Optometrist and the referral states that an Ophthalmological opinion is indicated then the patient is invariably referred to an Eye Clinic. The GP does not have the time or equipment to carry out a detailed examination of the eyes. This current system thus in many cases does not reflect efficient use of time for GP or patient.

After discussion between the Optometric Adviser and the Local Optometric Committee, Local Medical Committee and Consultant Ophthalmologists a direct referral scheme for Optometric referrals to the Ophthalmic Departments at The Ipswich and West Suffolk Hospitals has been available from Tuesday 1st October 2002

The Suffolk Direct Referral Scheme is run on the following lines:-

- All Optometrists and Ophthalmic Medical Practitioners (OMPs) on the Suffolk Ophthalmic List are invited to participate.
- Only those Practitioners who attended one of the educational launch meetings held in September 2002 were able to participate in the scheme from the start date (1 October 2002).
- Practitioners wishing to participate in Direct Referral at a later date must attend one of the twice-yearly Referral Tutorial meetings. These are also open to Practitioners already participating in the scheme as an opportunity to keep updated on referral criteria and ask questions.
- Referrals of the participating Optometrists will be monitored (Clinical Audit) to ensure efficiency of the system and to identify educational requirements.
- Only patients whose GP surgery is in Suffolk can be referred under the Direct Referral Scheme.
- The participating Optometrist refers direct under the scheme only those patients with ophthalmic problems for which the opinion of an Ophthalmologist is required and a prior consultation with the GP unnecessary.

- The Optometrist will continue to refer to the GP those patients presenting with signs of possible general health problems (physical or psychological) or with ophthalmological conditions benefiting from GP tests or advice initially.
- The Suffolk Direct Referral Scheme referral form is to be used for all direct referrals. This can be posted or faxed to the relevant Ophthalmic Department. If the referral is sent by fax the Optometrist should satisfy themselves that the referral has been received. The Optometrist also sends a copy of the referral to the patients GP. In due course direct referrals will be able to be sent by e-mail.
- The contact details of the hospitals accepting direct referrals under this scheme are:-

Ophthalmology Department
 The Ipswich Hospital NHS Trust
 The Ipswich Hospital
 Heath Road
 Ipswich IP4 5PD
 Tel: 01473 703230
 Fax: 01473 703838
 Main Hospital Tel: 01473 712233

Ophthalmology Department
 West Suffolk Hospital NHS Trust
 Hardwick Lane
 Bury St Edmunds IP33 2QZ
 Tel: 01284 713815
 Fax: 01284 713816
 Main Hospital Tel: 01284 713000

- If the patient wants or needs to be referred to a hospital other than the two participating in the scheme, the Optometrist refers to the GP.
- The appointment letter from the hospital will emphasise that the patient must bring to the eye clinic details of current medication, including over the counter preparations.
- The patient being referred should be informed to report back to the Optometry practice if a letter or appointment is not received from the hospital within 4 weeks. The Optometrist can then make the necessary enquiries at the appropriate Ophthalmic Department.
- Optometrists are asked to complete the referral form on a word processor or in neat writing to ensure ease of interpretation. It is important to include patient date of birth and full address details (for patient, GP and your own practice).
- Supplies of referral forms can be obtained from Stores at Suffolk Primary Care Trust (as for all NHS/GOS forms) preferably by using fax 01473 741991. The referral form is also available as an editable word file which can be e-mailed to you or supplied on floppy disc on request.

SCHEME UPDATE

The Suffolk Optometric Direct Referral Scheme has now been running since October 2002 and is being well received by professionals and patients alike.

The most significant benefit of Direct Referral is in saving time for both GPs and the patient. There is also a potential improvement in quality of referrals, from the use of a designated referral form on which is indicated the urgency of the referral and the specialist clinic required. The benefit of the scheme to Optometrists is an increase in job satisfaction and improved communication with the eye clinics. The beauty of the scheme is in its simplicity but it really would not have been possible without the already existing good relationship between Ophthalmologists, GPs and Optometrists in Suffolk.

Special thanks to the following individuals who were pivotal in the establishment of this innovative scheme:

Simon Hardman Lea, Consultant Ophthalmologist, The Ipswich Hospital NHS Trust
Tony Vivian, Consultant Ophthalmologist, West Suffolk Hospitals NHS Trust
Chris Wilbraham, Chairman, Suffolk Local Optometric Committee
Rudy Mercer, Secretary, Suffolk Local Medical Committee

Thanks also to Mr Lewis, Consultant Ophthalmologist, for taking on the pilot scheme that set the seeds for the countywide protocol, and also for the support of Suffolk PCTs.

Please contact me if you have any questions regarding the scheme.

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