



Llywodraeth Cymru
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Chief Optometric Advisor Wales Eye Care Digest



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Wales, David O'Sullivan OBE

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Dear Colleagues,

The past year has been incredibly busy for everyone. In October, we saw The National Health Service (Ophthalmic Services) (Wales) Regulations coming into force and underpinning this, we saw the new Wales General Ophthalmic Services (WGOS) 1 and 2 clinical manuals rolled out to support delivery. This groundbreaking achievement is a success that we all share, and I want to thank you, and all stakeholders from across eye care, for supporting the process. We have come a long way since the start of our journey in the Autumn of 2019.

As we continue to work together at pace, to implement optometry reform with all health boards, NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership, Health Education and Improvement Wales and Optometry Wales, we see real, meaningful change in Wales. This collaboration, underpinned by innovative new pathways

is a great testament to all who have facilitated the changes. The speed and agility that our profession and optometry practices across Wales have worked towards, and to be in a position to deliver our nationally agreed reform safely and effectively, is ensuring we deliver accessible eyecare services to citizens equitably across Wales.

It is not an understatement to say Wales is leading optometry clinical reform across the UK, and that optometrists and dispensing opticians are working at the top of their clinical licences. These are indeed exciting times and we have much to celebrate. Let's continue the momentum, working in partnership in the year ahead.

David O'Sullivan OBE,
Chief Optometric Advisor
for Wales

What is happening around Wales

The Welsh Government – Understanding policy and what drives change.

As you know, Wales is a devolved nation and has its own government, making policies and laws for our country. The Welsh Government work to help improve the lives of people in Wales and

make our nation a better place in which to live and work. There are a number of areas devolved governments are responsible for and health and social care is one of them.

A Healthier Wales (AHW) is the main strategic document that drives health policy and decisions. Launched in the summer of 2018, AHW included 40 actions to focus activity on the transformation required to achieve the Welsh Government vision of an integrated whole system approach to health and social care.

Since the introduction of AHW, there has been significant changes and disruption to the Health and Social Care systems in Wales, mainly due to the Covid pandemic; however, COVID-19 did accelerate transformational change in how health and social care services are delivered. The response to the pandemic has brought forward implementation of a number of long-term plans, including those in eye health care.

Following support from Cabinet, the Welsh Government have now critically reviewed the actions set out in AHW. Some of the original 40 actions have been closed or replaced by new actions to support the stabilisation and recovery of services following COVID-19 and to reflect priorities brought to the forefront by the pandemic.

Specifically, the new actions are:

Decarbonisation – Encourage and support health and social care delivery organisations to reduce energy use and carbon emissions to mitigate and adapt to the impact of climate change in line with our commitment to be a globally responsible Wales.

Inequities – Drive good practice to reduce health inequities and outcomes with a focus on those brought to the forefront during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Prevention – Build on the behaviours and personal responsibility demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic to help people stay well through an integrated approach to improving the nation's health and wellness.

Children and Young People – Ensure our transformation to a system of seamless health and care provision promotes the wider adoption of integrated and effective interventions for children, resulting in greater positive health and wellbeing outcomes over time.

Mental Health – Health and social care partners to work with Welsh Government to respond to the impacts of COVID-19 and ensure that all people in Wales have access to appropriate mental health support.

Capture innovative practices and new ways of working achieved during COVID-19 and ensure benefits are maintained in the Health and Social Care system.

Community based care – Develop value based, whole system care pathways for prevention, detection, treatment and ongoing care as close to home as possible and ensure that relevant measures are developed to capture the outcomes that matter to patients.

As we move forward, AHW will continue to be the Welsh Government's strategic framework for developing and implementing new ways of working, and links closely with the two main policy documents specific to optometry and eye health care, which are *NHS Wales eye health care: future approach for optometry services*, and *Optometry: delivering 'A Healthier Wales' 2021 to 2031*.

Science Evidence Advice (SEA) NHS in 10+ years – An examination of the projected impact of Long-Term Conditions and Risk Factors in Wales

In September 2023 the Chief Scientific Officer for Welsh Government published Scientific Evidence Advice to aid discussion about what the NHS will look like in ten years' time.

The NHS is now 75 years old and like any long-standing organisation it needs to evolve to support the circumstances we now face, whilst also looking to the future and what might be coming down the track.

Moving the NHS forward, we need to consider how we can preserve services at a level that will continue to reap benefits for our future generations whilst also supporting existing users. To do this, bold decisions need to be made around care pathways, the types and location of treatments and allocation of resources to ensure we maximise benefit relative to population needs.

With an ageing population some of what is coming down the track is inevitable; as people live longer into old age, the prevalence of certain conditions increase. However, much of what is projected is avoidable if we switch our focus to prevention to support our existing, and future generations, to make better decisions around their health and health related behaviours.

It is recognised that Wales has an older population than the other UK nations and that Wales faces challenges with regards to incidences of drinking, smoking, and obesity. This all impacts the health and wellbeing and demand for NHS services for citizens in Wales.

Switching the NHS focus to prevention and supporting the Welsh population to make significant changes to their behaviours and lifestyle to influence the future trajectory of long-term conditions, will require the creation of health promoting environments. Prevention is often more cost effective than treatment.

I would encourage all practitioners to take some time to consider the main policy documents of *“A Healthier Wales”* and *“NHS Wales eye health care: future approach for optometry services”*, together with the Welsh Optometric Committee report – *“Optometry: delivering ‘A Healthier Wales 2021 to 2031’* and the Science Evidence Advice (SEA) report. These documents help to understand how optometry service re-design has developed in Wales, and the context around which further developments will be considered and taken forward in Wales.

Eye health care transformation has just begun, and there is a real opportunity for all the profession to continue to shape the future, for the benefits of the profession and citizens of Wales.

Contract Reform: Successful Implementation

As part of transformational change, the aims of optometry contract reform have been to realise the vision for NHS Wales eye health care services, moving to a clinically appropriate service model based on the principles of *“A Healthier Wales”* and the seven well-being goals of the Future Generations (Wales) Act.

The purpose of the new eye care pathways is to reduce the demand on, and increase capacity in hospital eye departments through monitoring, management, and treatment in primary care. In doing so, and with accompanying changes to the financial remuneration model, this supports the transition of optometry practices away from the reliance on retail sales and towards a clinically sustainable future.

The whole system change in optometry, underpinned by innovative new pathways and introduction of new legislation, has already expanded the range of services we deliver on the high street, and alleviated pressure on GPs and hospitals.

The regulations coming into force in October 2023 was a significant moment; however, it was just one of many steps being

taken in our journey of implementation to deliver the new clinical model of eye health care that we have been working towards.

As you know, Wales General Ophthalmic Services (WGOS) 1 and WGOS 2 pathways are fully functional, and regulations apply specifically to these two pathways. WGOS 3, 4 and 5 pathways are regulated through legislative directions (as seen previously – Eye Health Examination Wales and Low Vision Service Wales legislative directions); however, whilst WGOS 3 is fully functional, WGOS 4 and 5 pathways are the next priority for our implementation groups.

This process has begun with the introduction of the Independent Prescribing Optometry pathway for WGOS 5 to treat and manage acute presentations from primary care. We expect full implementation of WGOS 4 and 5 by the end of March 2024.

Throughout this implementation process, I would encourage you all to monitor communications from the national WGOS Clinical Leads your local Optometric Advisors and Optometry Wales.

Workforce – Our ambition is to make Wales a place where people from across the profession, both in the UK and Europe, will want to come and work, embracing the opportunities we have established to train and deliver more clinical services in the community.

As you will appreciate, the investments we have made in optometry reform and upskilling the profession across Wales is unprecedented, and our approach has been to increase the numbers who have gained additional higher qualifications. This has been through our commitment to continued professional development and through new opportunities presented by Health Education and Improvement Wales and Cardiff University. This is further underpinned by three Teach and Treat Centres, and Wales's first Simulation Suite, which will support progress to implement more collaborative regional working.

Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW), established 5 years ago, strategically focusses on education and training and has been an integral part of optometry reform, supporting training in a number of ways through their learning site “Y Ty Dysgu”, set up in readiness for the new optometry contract, and completion of the mandatory modules we all underwent prior to the regulations coming into force.

HEIW also commission training modules for optometrists, dispensing opticians and contact lens opticians, ensuring equity of access across all areas of Wales. Over 200+ places have been commissioned within the last 3 years, and in 2023 a 30% increase in commissioning to support optometry reform in Glaucoma, MedicalRetina, Low Vision and Independent Prescribing for example. These higher qualifications are crucial to enable optometrists to manage and monitor more patients in the community that would otherwise go into hospital.

In addition to their training and commissioning role, HEIW also support the profession, particularly when taking on additional new roles to deliver optometry contract reform. Peer review meetings and mentoring sessions are unique and support people with new clinical service models such as Independent Prescribing (IP).

I would urge you to attend one of their multi-professional education events and their optometry **education conference** – one in South Wales and one in North Wales.

Teach and Treat Centres align with the optometry contract reform principles to upskill the profession and increase the number of optometrists with higher professional qualifications, by providing training placements for optometrists completing the clinical requirements of additional qualifications.

We have been investing in establishing regional Teach and Treat centres, working in partnership with Cardiff University and NHS Wales, with one centre already providing placements in Cardiff University, serving the profession in Southeast Wales.

The NHS Wales University Eye Care Centre in Hollywell Community Hospital received funding in 2023, and placements will start for optometrists in North Wales early in 2024. The third and final centre is being established at Singleton Hospital, and placements will start in March/April 2024 for optometrists in the Southwest region of Wales.

Simulation Suite – Investment has been provided by the Welsh Government to establish a new simulation suite in Cardiff for ophthalmology trainee doctors. This will complement all three of our Teach and Treat Centres, as well as enabling closer working relationships between optometry and ophthalmology.

The Royal College of Ophthalmologists training curriculum includes a mandatory requirement for simulation training before a trainee operates on a patient, therefore, the development of an ophthalmology simulation suite in Wales has been a welcome and vital development.

The Teach and Treat Centres and simulation suite will enhance multi-disciplinary training for primary and secondary care across Wales. Our goal is for Wales to be the best place to train and work in the UK for all professions involved in the delivery of eye care. We want clinicians from across all professions, to train in Wales and remain in Wales.

Good News Stories

The Minister for Health and Social Services spoke at our recent Eyecare Conference, and she relayed the story of Lucy Owen from the BBC.

Lucy, as part of our “Help Us to Help You Campaign”, took our advice regarding the importance of regular sight tests and visited her local optometry practice, where it was diagnosed that she needed immediate emergency treatment to save her sight.

Lucy’s story will help raise the profile of eye care services provided in Wales and the importance of regular eye care health checks.

In early Autumn, we saw the First Minister undertake a number of health-related visits within Wales, including a visit to the Cardiff Teach and Treat Centre, and Monnow Eyecare in Monmouth. The First Minister wanted the opportunity to speak with both optometrists and patients, to gain a better understanding of how new optometry pathways are being delivered in practice, and the effect of delivering care closer to home for patients.

The First Minister will undertake more of these visits during 2024.

IT Data and Digital: Latest Developments

Our ambition remains to introduce electronic referral from community optometry practices to hospital eye departments, connecting the whole system. This will help to provide safe and timely patient referrals for diagnosis and treatment and ultimately shared care. Ensuring referrals are made quickly and safely avoiding delay in treatment is vital to improve patient outcomes.

Significant investment has been made by the Welsh Government to introduce optometry email addresses, electronic referral and a national Electronic Patient Record (EPR) for eye care. Whilst this has not progressed at the pace anticipated, please be assured that work is ongoing, and in some health boards roll out of parts of the new IT Data and Digital systems are underway.

In the coming weeks, Digital Health Care Wales (DHCW) will be working to ensure all optometrists will have access to NHS email addresses in 2024. This will speed up the electronic process until DHCW have deployed both electronic-referral and EPR across Wales. I would urge you to get involved via your Regional Optometric Committee as we move towards a fully digital system.

Eye Care Statistics Bulletin

[Eye care statistics: April 2021 to March 2023 | GOV.WALES](#)

A Greener Wales

The Welsh Government has made climate change a core policy focus and are actively promoting actions and policies in optometry that support making NHS Wales Net Zero by 2030. This includes policies that support decarbonisation and sustainability.

The Greener Primary Care Framework and Award Scheme, which supports the four independent primary care contractor services in Wales – community pharmacy, primary care dentistry, general practice and community optometry, includes actions to make practices more sustainable, earn recognition and reach the Welsh Government’s decarbonisation targets.

This includes optometry specific actions such as encouraging patients to reuse frames and just replace lenses where possible, to donate lenses for repurposing, recycling old spectacles, reusing the same glasses case as well as recycle their single use plastic contact lenses.

Other examples of changes seen in optometry practices in Wales include:

- Changing the default search engine on all work computers. Ecosia is a search engine that uses revenue generated by search advertisements to fund tree planting projects around the world. (Canton Optical)

Wales Eyecare Conference 2023

The purpose of our annual National Eye Care Conference is to facilitate networking and collaborative working between all partners, to share up to date information and key messages and to learn more about the role of the different organisations across Wales. Jointly organised by Welsh Government and Wales Council of the Blind, the November 2023 conference was timely, just after the introduction of our new regulations.

The Minister for Health and Social Services keynote speech highlighted the Welsh Governments policy development, new regulations, and ongoing commitment to improve eye health care provision and patient access to services across Wales.

This year’s conference theme

‘Future Approach for Optometry: Successful Reform and Implementation’ emphasised the

- Stopping the use of disposable pens. (Canton Optical)
- Completing a staff travel audit and discussing their modes of transport to work, which enabled the practice to realise that what is good for planetary health is also good for personal health. This stimulated positive behaviour change and saw an increase in walking to work and a fresh engagement with the Cycle to Work Scheme. (Buckley Eyecare)
- Policy for Green Impact: 10-point action plan for 2023. (Pearce & Blackmore Opticians)

The scheme launched in 2022 by Public Health Wales and after a successful first year, was relaunched in March 2023. A high number of practices have registered, but there is still more work to be done.

The Welsh Government encourages all optometry contractors to Engage with the Framework and to review their practices’ ways of working.

importance of successful reform embedded through our **“Future Approach for Optometry Services”**.

The conference also provided the opportunity to look at the journey of our profession over the past 20 years – upskilling to support the introduction of more clinical pathways, to use the skills the profession has been trained for, and to help to prevent sight loss in Wales.

The conference continues to prompt discussion and challenge the status quo to further improve patient outcomes and experience.

Planning will soon start for the 2024 conference, and we will continue to listen and learn from the audience and profession. For conference details or to put forward any areas for presentation please contact: Owen Williams, Director, Wales Council of the Blind; Owen@wcb-ccd.org.uk

Getting Involved

Primary Care Clusters bring together all local services involved in health and care across a geographical area, typically serving a population between 25,000 and 100,000. Working as a cluster ensures care is better co-ordinated to promote the wellbeing of individuals and communities.

The development of optometry professional collaboratives is an exciting opportunity for optometry to be an equal partner in influencing and shaping services as part of primary care clusters, to meet the eye health needs of patients. Engagement in optometry professional collaboratives is part of optometry terms of service, and it is imperative that practices identify leads and ensure that they are fully engaged with ongoing meetings.

Regional Optical Committees (ROC) were formed to be the official representatives for all GOS contractors and practitioners within their area, to work with their local health boards on matters relating to NHS optical services. Local optical committees merged to become ROCs and these now form the statutory groups to engage with local health boards.

ROCs are split into three regions covering Wales:

North Wales Regional Optical Committee covering Betsi Cadwalader University Health Board.

South East Wales Regional Optometric Committee covering Aneurin Bevan, Cardiff and the Vale and Cwm Taff Morgannwg University Health Boards.

South West Wales Regional Optometric Committee covering Swansea Bay University Health Board and Hywel Dda University Health Boards together with Powys Teaching Health Board.

ROCs are keen to welcome new members and so if you simply want to find out more, go along to a meeting as an observer. Being a member of the committee allows local professionals to help deliver local eye care and to influence health board decisions about patient care.

The Welsh Optometric Committee (WOC) has a pivotal role for optometry and provides expert professional advice to Welsh Ministers and Welsh Government officials on all matters relating to the eye health care, including health service policy, delivery, and workforce issues.

ROCs feed into the WOC with good representation from each region. This is comprised of:

Three optometrists and one dispensing optician nominated by each of the ROC's one of whom must be employed in an NHS Hospital.

With all the changes in delivery of eye care in Wales, it is important that the profession is involved and continues to shape future developments.

For more information about becoming involved in ROCs and WOC please contact Optometry Wales who provide business support for the ROC's: officemanager@Optometrywales.com

These are exciting times for our profession, and we have much to be proud of in Wales. The new working environment is based on why optometrists and dispensing opticians entered the profession; to provide clinical services and work at the top of their licence.

I very much hope that we will continue to embrace these new opportunities together, as we deliver current reform and consider future developments to support patients, improve access and outcomes, and continue to provide exceptional primary eye care services for the 21st century.

Contact details and resources

Welsh Government

Feedback and items for including in the next edition of the Eye digest:

HSS-PrimaryCareMailbox@gov.wales

Please contact your local health board to speak to your local optometric advisers and other primary care contacts.

For further information regarding HEIW contact: heiw.optometry@wales.nhs.uk

Useful links

[Optometry: delivering 'A Healthier Wales' 2021 to 2031 | GOV.WALES](#)

[NHS Wales eye health care: future approach for optometry services | GOV.WALES](#)

[Science Evidence Advice \(SEA\) \(gov.wales\)](#)

[The Greener Primary Care Wales Framework Award Scheme 2023 – All Wales Therapeutics and Toxicology Centre \(nhs.wales\)](#)

primarycareone.nhs.wales/topics1/greener-primary-care/greener-primary-care-wales-2022-yearbook/

[College of Optometrists patient leaflets and resources](#)

[Patient leaflets and resources – College of Optometrists \(college-optometrists.org\)](#)

[Programme for Government 2021 to 2026 Programme for government | GOV.WALES](#)

[Eye care statistics\) April 2021 to March 2023](#)

[Eye care statistics: April 2021 to March 2023 | GOV.WALES](#)

[The Well-being of Future Generations | GOV.WALES](#)

[NHS Wales decarbonisation strategic delivery plan | GOV.WALES](#)