

Avon LOC – 2021/22 Chairs Report

It really doesn't seem like a year has passed, as this year's cycle of AGMs comes around. 2021-22 much like the previous has still been bathed in the amber phase of the College of Optoms guidance for sight testing and clinical practice. We are still limited in access to primary care across all 3 sectors of Optometry, General Practice and Dental. While, our Pharmacy colleagues are expanding their remit to help support GPs further.

In our sphere, we have continued in Bath to provide the CUES (Covid Urgent Eyecare – similar to MECs) service, which has now been renewed until 2023, giving a lifeline to patients unable to fund a private emergency appointment and taking the weight off stretched eye casualty units. Sadly, uptake for the service has not been quite at the levels we would like in terms of practice sign-up, but as most know – demand is still high for our traditional services.

Further services in the Bath have on-going discussions, but nothing concrete is tabled yet. It has been an uphill journey to explain to commissioners and their advisors how GOS is funded and what is not in scope for a referral without an extended service being commissioned. Nevertheless, these conversations are on-going.

Positively, our continuing dialogue with Bristol, North Somerset and South Glos Clinical commissioning group (BNSSG CCG) – soon to be an integrated care system (ICS) – and Bristol Eye Hospital (BEH) has yielded some good progress.

By the summer, we hope to be piloting a funded and unique data gathering service – where community opticians sites will be funded to help BEH with its backlog of patients in stable and suspect glaucoma. More info on this to follow in the coming weeks/months – please look out for a webinar invite to discuss further and express your interest. With successful pilot of this and a roll out, the scope of this project is expansive and may include, medical retina, further glaucoma and other shared care projects / referral platforms down the line. Secondly, with the current post op cataract scheme for Bristol GP registered patients – never quite getting off the ground, the CCG and BEH have agreed to expand this service to the whole of BNSSG. Again we will launch this formally by the summer, so please look out for further communication around this. We appreciate your patience, in the post op scheme as we are aware many practices are wanting to register to this.

There have been a lot of discussions with the wider NHS and including the LOC as part of their Primary care offering – this has included the very successful vaccine roll out but more recently, we have been offered mental health and coaching support. The primary care links have also led to us being part of the research and learning project around long-COVID, with a webinar on this due post Easter. I encourage all to take part in these offers and share them with your staff and teams.

Outside of the two areas, the post op scheme with Newmedica and Spa Medica are on going. The Newmedica offering is still administered via Opera and Primary Eyecare Services, with fees going direct to the practices. Spa Medica tell me that they are also “on Opera” but referrals are yet to come out via that platform. Discussions are being had for a similar post op scheme with Emersons Green treatment centre and more details will follow when we have contracts in place.

I hope that everyone and their families are doing well and I look forward to seeing some of you at our up-coming face to face events. The first one being a CPD hands on foreign body removal event with model eyes – watch this space for more information.