

# WELSH HEALTH CIRCULAR



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

**Issue Date:** 03 September 2018

**STATUS: INFORMATION**

**CATEGORY: GOVERNANCE**

**Title:**

**Sharing Patient information between healthcare professionals – a joint statement from the Royal College of Ophthalmologists and College of Optometrists**

**Date of Expiry / Review** n/a

**For Action by:**  
Health Boards

**Action required by:**  
Immediate

**Sender:** David O'Sullivan – Chief Optometric Advisor

**HSSG Welsh Government Contact(s) :**

Sarah O'Sullivan-Adams, Head of Audiology and Ophthalmic Policy Branch  
Directorate of Primary Care and Innovation  
sarah.osullivan-adams@gov.wales

**Enclosure(s):** n/a

## **Sharing Patient information between healthcare professionals – a joint statement from the Royal College of ophthalmologists and College of Optometrists.**

On 20 March 2015 the Royal College of Ophthalmologists and the College of Optometrists issued a joint statement encouraging ophthalmologists to share clinical information with the referring optometrist, please see the joint statement below.

Health boards should ensure hospital policies and procedures encourage this communication so that it becomes standard practice for planned and unplanned ophthalmology care in Wales.

### Joint statement:

People using health and social care services are entitled to expect that their personal information will remain confidential. However, people also expect professionals to share information with other members of the care team. Good sharing of information, when sharing is appropriate, is as important as maintaining confidentiality. Optometrists, as regulated professionals, are part of the healthcare team so it is usually in the patients' best interest for ophthalmologists to share clinical information with the referring optometrist. This will improve the care of the patient and that of future patients, by providing useful feedback about the diagnosis and management. It will also reduce duplication of tests and possible unnecessary re-referrals. Unless the hospital policy specifically prohibits sending copies of letters to optometrists, ophthalmologists should send copies of GP letters to the referring optometrist after confirming consent by the patient. The consent must be recorded in the notes.

**New referrals from optometrists to ophthalmologists:** The majority of new patient referrals to ophthalmologists are initiated by optometrists. It is important for purposes of continuity of care as well as professional feedback and courtesy that the ophthalmologist replies to the referring optometrist\*. A copy should be sent to the patient's registered GP (as the formal Primary Care 'gatekeeper') and where appropriate to the patient. This also applies to patients attending for unscheduled eye care. The ophthalmologist should inform the patient of this process. A patient may object to information shared via this process and this should be noted on the patient record.

**Patients seen for a follow-up appointment by ophthalmologists in the hospital eye service:** Correspondence should be sent to the registered GP (as 'gatekeeper'). With patient agreement a copy should also be sent the patient's nominated optometrist (as patients are not formally registered with a particular optometrist) and where appropriate to the patient themselves. The nominated optometrist should be confirmed with the patient on each occasion (as the patient may change their nominated optometrist at any time). The patient's verbal consent to the sharing of information with their optometrist is confirmed by the ophthalmologist recording in the patient notes the identity of

the patient's nominated optometrist. This process will enable the ophthalmologist to address the correspondence correctly.

Optometrists can help to ensure that they receive feedback by always including their name and contact details clearly on the referral letter.

\*In a small number of cases, where there is a need for direct action from a medical practitioner (e.g. GP in primary care), the correspondence may be addressed to the medical practitioner (with reference to the referral originating in optometric practice). The relevant clinical information and advice (for the medical practitioner) should be provided and a copy or other explanatory correspondence sent to the patient and the referring optometrist.

GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018

This is in line with the General Data Protection Regulation and National data opt out scheme which sits alongside the normal data protection rules.

[1] Dame Fiona Caldicott, The Information Governance Review, March 2013, page 21 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-information-governance-review>

<https://www.rcophth.ac.uk/2015/03/sharing-patient-information-between-healthcare-professionals-a-joint-statement-from-the-royal-college-of-ophthalmologists-and-college-of-optometrists/>