



The Royal College of  
Ophthalmologists

**PRESS RELEASE: LONDON, 23 Oct 2014**

**The Royal College of Ophthalmologists calls for the All Party Parliamentary Group for Eye Health to support raising awareness of capacity issues affecting Eye Health Services in the UK**

The All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Eye Health and Visual Impairment met with representatives from The Royal College of Ophthalmologists (RCOphth) and the College of Optometrists to discuss the eye health sector's response to a recent consultation from NHS England. The consultation, **'Improving eye health and reducing sight loss - a call to action'** asked how we can solve the biggest challenges facing eye health in today's NHS England.

**Miss Melanie Corbett, Consultant Ophthalmologist at Western Eye Hospital, Imperial College NHS Trust, London and Executive Committee Member of the RCOphth**, focused on raising concerns about the capacity issues facing eye service clinics today and the effect this potentially has on the health and safety of patients. Speaking for the first time to the APPG, Miss Corbett commented, **'The demand on eye services has increased by 30% over the last five years in the UK.** This is largely due to an ageing population with the associated chronic diseases such as glaucoma, age related macular degeneration (AMD) and diabetes.'

Increasingly, **the capacity deficit is also a symptom of delivering successful new treatments** for conditions such as AMD. As more patients are correctly diagnosed earlier and treated with effective new drugs, this leads to more patients in the system that require regular follow-up appointments over the course of their lifetime to reduce the risk of sight loss. Miss Corbett outlined further recommendations from the RCOphth including the use of multi-disciplinary teams and advanced IT and communication systems to ensure that patients are not lost in the system between hospital and community settings.

Recognising that non-medically qualified professionals are needed as part of an ophthalmology led service to support an increase in capacity, Miss Corbett continued, **'Ophthalmologists are the only medically qualified practitioners in the optical sector. We believe that because of their extensive medical training, they are the right professionals to lead up-skilled multi-disciplinary teams**, which can include orthoptists, optometrists, ophthalmic nurses and technicians. It is essential that proper training and regulatory processes are in place to deliver quality assurance and patient safety.'

NHS England is using responses from the eye health sector to inform the first ever national commissioning strategy for Clinical Commissioning Groups for eye health in England. The Royal College of Ophthalmologists is calling for a number of changes in the way that eye care is delivered to ensure that **patients are seen by the appropriate professional in the right location and at the right time to increase capacity and reduce the risk of sight loss for patients.**

#ends#

## Notes to Editors

Core recommendations by The Royal College of Ophthalmologists for NHS England's Call to Action – 'Improving eye health and reducing sight loss'

- **identify need** – gather accurate data
- **ensure adequate quality standards** and build in audit of practice for outcome data clarify **costs of** implementing the right service needs at a local/regional level
- **train the workforce** for extended roles across a number of medical and non-medical disciplines, continue to assess and maintain high professional standards
- **utilise consultant led pathways** – clinically evidenced based to meet the needs of patients
- **develop relationships** – communicate and collaborate across teams, both in and outside of hospital settings
- **provide adequate communication systems and IT** that help monitor, assess and identify patient follow up care

For the full response go to [www.rcophth.ac.uk/calltoaction](http://www.rcophth.ac.uk/calltoaction)

## About The Royal College of Ophthalmologists

The Royal College of Ophthalmologists (RCOphth) is the only professional body for eye doctors, who are medically qualified and have undergone or are undergoing specialist training in the treatment and management of eye disease, including surgery. As an independent charity, we pride ourselves on providing impartial and clinically based evidence, putting patient care and safety at the heart of everything we do. Ophthalmologists are at the forefront of eye health services because of their extensive training and experience.

RCOphth received its Royal Charter in 1988 and has over 3,500 members in the UK and overseas. We are not a regulatory body, but we work collaboratively with government, health departments, charity and eye health organisations to recommend and support improvements in the co-ordination and management of eye care both nationally and regionally.

[www.rcophth.ac.uk](http://www.rcophth.ac.uk)

The APPG, founded in 2003 and run by the College of Optometrists and RNIB, was established to raise parliamentarians' awareness of the importance of high quality eye care for the prevention of eye disease and blindness, for the eye health of the nation and to promote better understanding of visual impairment and greater social inclusion.

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