

Position Statement on developing a Competency Framework for expanded ophthalmic roles for Ophthalmic Nurses, Optometrists, Orthoptists and Ophthalmic Clinical Scientists

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Hospital eye services continue to provide exceptional patient services. But under increasing demand and a lack of capacity, healthcare professionals' ability to offer patient care and treatment safely is being compromised.

Those professional bodies delivering eye care services recognise this issue and have come together to develop a competency framework. This will standardise education and training for the non-medical eye healthcare workforce, to competently take on expanded roles within a multi-disciplinary team, to effectively deliver optimum patient care safely.

This joint position statement covers all four countries in the United Kingdom. It sets out the position of the ophthalmic professional bodies with regard to training and education for graduate optometrists, orthoptists, ophthalmic nurses and ophthalmic clinical scientists and practitioners to carry out expanded roles within a standardised competency framework.



The ROYAL COLLEGE of
OPHTHALMOLOGISTS



Royal College
of Nursing



THE COLLEGE
OF OPTOMETRISTS



British and Irish Orthoptic Society



Association of Health
Professions in Ophthalmology

Current and future challenges

Vision is the one sense people fear losing the most. Many of the eye diseases which cause sight loss are more common in older people and our aging population means the demand on ophthalmology, as on all areas of healthcare, is unprecedented.

Hospital attendances have increased year on year in the UK, with over 100 million outpatient appointments made in England alone during 2013-14 of which 10% attend for eye care. Common eye conditions, which were previously untreatable, such as age related macular degeneration, can now be treated successfully, but this adds to the demand. With an increase of 30% in eye clinic attendances over the last five years in England we can no longer ignore the pressure building up in hospital ophthalmic services.

As people live longer it is recognised that more long term conditions will develop and eye health and preservation of sight is vitally important in retention of independence and wellbeing – both physical and mental - helping to lessen the impact on social services and community care.

The professional bodies involved in developing the competency framework are asking commissioners, service providers and employers to work with us to ensure that a flexible workforce, with the right skills and training, are able to deliver a service fit for the 21st century.

Ophthalmic nurses, optometrists, orthoptists and ophthalmic clinical scientists

These clinicians are recognised as autonomous practitioners within their own core profession. They have absorbed practices which are common and multi-disciplinary and were previously the domain of medically qualified ophthalmologists. Importantly, these expanded roles have not always been met with equivalent changes in education and training.

Adoption of a competency framework will offer commissioners, service providers and employers a structured approach to accountable, efficient and improved delivery of patient care as outlined in The Francis Report 2013. It will also provide a recognised UK-wide education and training system.

Relevance to Commissioners, Service Providers and Employers

Changes to the way eye care and treatment is delivered involves a number of professionals within a multi-disciplinary team. The RCOphth, RCN, CoO, BIOS and APHO recognise that these team members have taken on expanded roles beyond their core professional competences.

In order to develop a workforce fit to deliver safe, efficient and cost effective eye care to the UK population, the competency framework will provide:

- Improved service provision through the use of an upskilled workforce, enabling it to manage demand more effectively
- Transparency of roles and levels of competence, vital for future workforce planning to meet the increasing demands placed on eye services, improving efficiencies in cost and resources
- The rationale and importance for the ophthalmic workforce to maintain skills, keep current with developments and to be able to demonstrate this
- Linkage and recognition of better education and training with improved service provision
- Enable tasks to be provided flexibly and more efficiently by a wider group of upskilled and multi-disciplined professionals
- A means of integrated patient-centred care, ensuring this is given at the right time, by the right person in the right place spanning the community and secondary care interface

Benefits for the workforce in expanded multi-disciplinary roles

A competency framework will provide recognised and standardised training and education across the UK, improving outcomes for both patients and the workforce providing care. Through standardisation, healthcare professionals will be able to deliver the right care safely within their recognised competences and training. It will offer:

- Understanding that knowledge, skills and experience will be obtained through recognised local training associated with post graduate education programmes
- Recognition of the importance of continuing professional development to maintain and update competences and knowledge
- National recognition of each level to improve recruitment and transference of skills, encouraging other non-medical healthcare professionals to take on expanded roles due to better recognition of competences and improved training
- Removal of duplication of different professional education and training offerings
- Transitional arrangements for those who have already been trained and assessed to continue to undertake recognised extended roles

Benefits to patients of a workforce better equipped to carry out expanded roles within ophthalmic service provision

Patients are the focus of everything we do. Safe delegation of tasks is currently difficult in an environment where training and qualifications have not been standardised.

Through the development of a competency framework, the benefits to patients will include:

- Patient centred care which is flexible and better integrated
- Improved and efficient service provision, meeting the needs of all ophthalmic patients
- Clearly defined professional roles and levels of competence in providing care and treatment for patients

The Royal College of Ophthalmologists represents ophthalmologists, who are the medically trained eye care professionals

www.rcophth.ac.uk

Nurses are represented by the Royal College of Nursing and regulated by the Nursing and Midwifery Council

www.rcn.org.uk

Optometrists are represented by the College of Optometrists and regulated by the General Optical Council

www.college-optometrists.org

Orthoptists are represented by the British and Irish Orthoptic Society and regulated by the HCPC

www.orthoptics.org.uk

Association of Health Professions in Ophthalmology have a remit to consider and recommend the education and training of ophthalmic support workers

www.ahpo.net

References

Five Year Forward View (England)

www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/futurenhs

The 2020 Workforce Vision Everyone Matters (Scotland)

www.gov.scot/Topics/Health/NHS-Workforce/Policy/2020-Vision

Working Differently – Working together (Wales)

www.weds.wales.nhs.uk/what-is-working-differently-working-together

Making Life Better (Northern Ireland)

www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/articles/making-life-better-strategic-framework-public-health

Nurse Innovators (RCN)

www.rcn.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/633470/SC0511-Nurse-Innovators-Report.pdf

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