Dear Colleagues,

Some of you may have seen the recent communications sent out regarding Sussex ICB’s decision to decommission MECS that has been running in East Sussex.

Following notification, the LOC requested engagement with commissioners to understand better the rationale for the decommissioning of the service and, where possible, ensure all appropriate activity was preserved. The LOC also sought a collaborative approach to better assess the impact of decommissioning services on patients, clinical outcomes and broader system pressures.

Unfortunately, this offer of support was not taken up, and the LOC could not fully establish a rationale behind the decision to decommission and highlight the potential impacts of the decision or were given the opportunity to do this.

Providers of MECS should be prepared to withdraw the current service provision as you will not be commissioned or funded beyond 31st December 2023. Patient care will transition to the new ICB arrangements which you can see in the attached letter sent to GPs.

For those practices who were not part of MECS but were referring patients onto a MECS provider, please be aware that these practices will not be able to see these patients beyond the 31st December2023. You should also revert to the referral advice set out by the ICB in the attached letter.

The ICB feel that community Optometry has not made enough of a difference in preventing A&E admissions within Sussex and therefore come to the decision they have.

The LOC would like to take this opportunity to remind everyone that these MECS presenting symptoms are not covered under GOS and so should not be used to manage these patients so an NHS sight test should not be used to manage these patients.

In light of the above the LOC advice is to fully utilise the pathways of sending patients to Hospital A&E, GPs or Pharmacy based on their symptoms. This should make it very clear that there was a significant need for the service that has been pulled.

We cannot stop anyone seeing these patients privately but advise if you choose to do this, you charge an appropriate fee for your clinical expertise. We need to work together not to fall into the trap of mopping up these patients for the ICB and absorbing these patients within our clinics for a fee which often is detrimental to our business.

For East Sussex patients the ICB have provided the following contact details for patients:

Conquest Hospital Tel: 03001314500

Eastbourne Hospital Tel: 03001314500

Sussex Eye Hospital: 01273 696955

If you have patients who are concerned or unhappy about the loss of the service, they can contact the ICB on: sxicb.contactus-plannedcare@nhs.net

Thank you again for your support in providing this service, which has been highly valued by patients.