

CHAIR REPORT FOR AGM 2025

The LOC acts as the link between the three ICBs across Herts and west Essex, the NHS/Trusts and you, the practitioners. We are funded by a small levy taken from every NHS sight test performed by practitioners in Hertfordshire. This is used for our operating costs such as producing the regular Mailchimp newsletters you all receive, responding to practitioner queries, organising CPD evenings, attending meetings with Herts & west Essex ICB, Independent Service Providers (ISPs) like NewMedica, the Local Eye Health Network, our LOCSU fee, attending the HWE Primary Care Commissioning Committee, liaising with the Trusts (both Watford and Lister) to name but a few.

The LOC is supported by the Local Optical Committee Support Unit (LOCSU). Their remit is to support all LOCs across a spectrum of activities. These include educational opportunities through WOPEC (free with a code from the LOC so please ask us for one), developing local eye health services utilising optical practices and acting as a key link between national professional optical bodies such as ABDO, AOP, and so on.

We have had several successes during the past year and I am proud to share them with you here.

Hypertension pilot scheme

Herts LOC has been actively involved in the planning and implementation of a **hypertension pilot scheme** which has been funded by HWE ICB and is currently running in several Optometry practices. It is now being extended into the next financial year and the results will be shared with us later this year once the evaluation team have completed their analysis. Anecdotally, it does appear that a significant number of undiagnosed hypertensives have been found and referred on for further assessment.

ECLO

We have also been involved in the discussions to successfully obtain the services of an **ECLO** at all three Trusts in the ICB - Watford/St Albans, Lister/QE11 and Princess Alexandra hospitals. The new ECLO practitioners are now in post and currently finishing off their training. They are initially being funded by the RNIB for the next three to five years.

Herts Vision Loss

Our local Low Vision charity, **Herts Vision Loss**, has hospital volunteers supporting low vision clinics, and are keen to ensure that the new ECLOs and the volunteers work seamlessly together to support patients, particularly those newly diagnosed with sight loss, by signposting them to community-based support.

We have been advising on the possibility of a direct referral route for you all to use in order to get expert advice and support for your visually impaired patients in a timely manner.

Herts Vision Loss were awarded the Kings Award for Voluntary Services this year and, Kavita, one of the Committee, will be attending the presentation ceremony on behalf of Herts LOC later this week. It is certainly a well deserved award in recognition of the longstanding support they give to the visually impaired.

GOS contracts reissue project

The LOC was asked by the ICB during last year, to help them get the last few practices signed up to have their **GOS contracts reissued**. We reached out to these remaining practices and provided support in getting these completed. The Optometry team at the ICB were very grateful that this project was now completed having been ongoing for two or three years.

Single Point of Access

The next item of news is that south and west Herts have a new **Single Point of Access** (SPoA) for our referrals, which went live today. The LOC represented you, our practitioners, to try to make the transition as smooth as possible. We have participated in some of the live testing, suggested some modifications, added in some extra suppliers of services, helped with both editing the communications and cascading to you all.

So far, 58 practices have submitted the onboarding forms which is the majority of the practices in S&W Herts.

Hopefully, this is a first step to improving referral pathways and future enhanced services across Herts although, for the moment, east & north Herts practitioners still need to send referrals to the GP.

Hydroxychloroquine screening

Another success for the LOC was to finally get the **Hydroxychloroquine screening** pathway we had been assisting with completed. The go-live date is in April 2025 and the comms were sent out last week. This has been an ongoing ICB project for well over a year, starting with mapping

out what was available in each Trust, taking into account the College of Ophthalmologists guidelines, ensuring the GPs were in agreement, the governance being completed such as how long a patient should wait for either Dermatology or Rheumatology advice to us finally proof reading the Comms.

MECS update

To the far east of the county, we still have a couple of border practices linked into the West Essex Minor Eye Conditions Service (**MECS**) for any patient whose registered GP is in West Essex and who presents at a Herts optometry practice with symptoms listed on the inclusion list. This small MECS has been running successfully for approx five years now. The data shows that is successful at reducing the number of patients attending their local hospital eye unit but the ICB has not extended the scheme so far even though Lister hospital Urgent Eye Clinic is frequently is overwhelmed.

Steve, our Vice Chair, is currently overseeing an audit of the patients who arrive with a 'minor eye condition' in a few volunteer practices and who are successfully seen without the need for secondary care. He is also looking at data from the Urgent Eye Clinic which will illustrate who could have been dealt with in an optometry practice instead. He will present this data to the ICB as evidence of the need for a MECS locally. Currently, over 80% of England has a MECS in place so Herts is an outlier for this.

The LOC have been assisting E&N Herts ICB with a business case for a MECS and this is currently ongoing. We realise that MECS is something many of you are asking for and we have been relentless in pursuing this for the benefit of our patients and to reduce this inequity of care which currently exists.

LinkedIn

This has been running for just over a year and currently stands at 108 followers which is a tremendous achievement - we are now one of the LOCs with the highest number of followers and I'd like to thank Seema for all her hard work on this.

Mailchimp

We will continue to keep you updated on future events and developments using our easily recognisable Mailchimp newsletters. I would like to thank Steve for his organisation skills at producing these to such a consistently high standard.

Website

Please do look at the HERTS LOC website <https://www.loc-online.co.uk/hertfordshire-loc/> and sign up if you have not already done so. Our current membership now stands at over 500 members. We update the Referral Contacts page regularly but this will need a further update soon to reflect our new SPoA for S&W Herts so do look out for it.

Looking back over the year, the LOC should be proud of what it's achieved so far. There is always an ongoing schedule of meetings, some weekly, some monthly and some adhoc but the ICB, the ISPs and the Trusts are now recognising the important role we can play in improving the eye health of the population for the future. There are many challenges ahead especially with the reduced funding to the ICBs but the LOC will endeavour to push for greater involvement like we have in the past.

The work of the LOC is very varied with knowledge needed not only in commissioning but clinical input too. Our committee all have many talents whether it's in a particular area like low vision, or medical retina or willingly volunteering to do a particular job. Together as a team, we have been able to achieve so much.

Do remember that we are here to represent and support you so please contact us for our help.

Thank you all and especially to the whole of the committee for their never-ending support.

Best wishes, Jane