OFNC
Association of British Dispensing Opticians
Association of Optometrists
British Medical Association
Federation of Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians
Optometric Fees Negotiating Committee
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Secretary: David Hewlett

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IMPORTANT LOC AND GOS CONTRACTOR BRIEFING: GOS SURVEY FEEDBACK, AND ERS FUNDING AND IMPLEMENTATION IN ENGLAND

This update includes immediate actions for LOCs and contractors locally.

Dear LOCs and GOS contractors in England

Contractor Survey

First, thank you for taking part in the OFNC survey to assess GOS workload, which closed on Monday (22 June), and received high levels of contractor engagement. The aim of the survey was to systematically gather evidence about unfunded activity linked to GOS delivery and related work in addition to other cost pressures, which will inform the current year's fees negotiation with Government. We are currently reviewing the results which we will share with the Minister and DHSC officials, but the themes are clear. The vast majority of you can no longer afford – and are unwilling to continue – to provide services as goodwill without funding.

As you are aware following the OFNC engagement events organised for us by LOCSU, we have highlighted to the Minister and DHSC officials the significant stresses on practices and staff already caused by the low level of GOS fees.

ERS

Despite this, we understand that LOCs and GOS contractors are now being approached directly by NHS England to encourage participation in ERS rollout, without any form of costed plan to support implementation in our sector. While we understand the NHS's managerial imperative to try and accelerate ERS rollout, this approach is premature as far as primary care optometry is concerned.

That is why the OFNC is strongly advising LOCs and GOS contractors against making any local commitments about ERS adoption until current discussions at government level are complete.

Important developments like ERS cannot be run as unfunded burdens on GOS as this may create unintended patient safety risks.

Please see the original DHSC ERS press statement of 8 June and the OFNC response of 9 June.

GOS Infrastructure and ERS Funding

Regrettably the bulk of ERS implementation at practice-level and ongoing running costs are as yet unfunded**,** apart from a small amount of NHS infrastructure and training money to be spent over a four-year window. As it stands, this means that contractors will be required to put in significant new funding to make the plans work.

Attempts by officials to rush out another IT transformation project that will require unfunded 'goodwill' is not something our sector can support. It would also be further evidence of NHS England creating additional unfunded burdens on primary eye care practices which are the only part of the system which stands not to be remunerated for the extra work involved. This is in stark contrast with the rest of the NHS, including other areas of primary care.

Ongoing National Level Workstreams

- OFNC has been asked to collect evidence of the unfunded burdens already on practices – this is now complete thanks to the work by contractors.
- The Minister has set up a 'task and finish group' with the sector to look at this evidence and potential ERS costs for further discussion with him before the start of the Parliamentary Recess on 16 July.
- The first meeting of the task and finish group will be on Monday 29 June once the analysis of the OFNC survey data has been submitted to the DHSC team.

New Actions for LOCs and Contractors

- OFNC advises that LOCs and contractors should not at this point make any commitments to ERS until the national negotiations are complete and we know what is and what is not feasible in terms of funding – this includes transitioning from, or building upon, existing local versions of ERS.
- OFNC asks that LOCs and contractors make this clear at any meetings with ICBs, NHS regions or Trusts that ERS – and any other developments of this type – must be funded at practice level.
- OFNC members are available to participate in any local meetings alongside LOCs and national NHS England colleagues. Please contact ofnc@fodo.com or info@locsu.co.uk marked FAO CEO.

We will continue to keep contractors and LOCs informed of progress.

Yours sincerely

Peter Hampson
OFNC Chair