

East Lancashire area LOC - Chairman's report 2017

Another year gone by, and I'm still in the Chair! Mustn't grumble, as it's been a good – though busy – one for the LOC. The many changes within the NHS haven't yet had a major impact on optometry, but there are signs which presage a significant sea-change, and we all need to look to windward.

Thankfully, one area of stability has been the Integrated Eyecare Service (IES), with many – though not all – of the IT issues settled, more practices and performers signed up, and a significant level of activity with which both the Acute Trust (ELHT - to whom we sub-contract our services) and the Clinical Commissioning Groups (East Lancashire and Blackburn with Darwen CCGs) are happy with the service – waiting times in the clinics are down – for example, over 1600 post-op cataract patients are handled in the community.

IT is still an issue, with some patients' discharge or referral from Triage not getting to the right practice, and there is a big problem with the payments system from ELHT – both these issues surround the portal from ELHT to Webstar – and are top of the latter's agenda for us. There are also some issues surrounding discharge of patients with Ocular Hypertension, but more on this later.

There are, sadly, some governance issues which the Performance Leads will be addressing in the coming months, and we do need to keep up with training and possibly introduce some mentoring for those who need some support in their practice. Training will be another area we will revisit, especially to maintain MECS accreditation and the cataract pathways, and we do need to expand the Low Vision Service to make the service more widespread and accessible, so there will be a training and discussion evening in the near future.

The future for the IES seems settled at present, though changes to the commissioning system may have some impact in the next few years. For now – the IES contract has been extended for another 12 months, and there are discussions regarding the second phase of the service. Glaucoma management is a very topical area at present, and you will have all seen the advert for 4 posts at ELHT to work alongside Mr Shankar to help out in the busy glaucoma clinics. We have been discussing with ELHT and the CCGs how further development of the existing OHT/suspect glaucoma pathway and use of virtual clinics can further help to reduce the pressure on Secondary Care.

The second pathway we have been working on surrounds Children's Vision, with a redesigned, Lancashire-wide, approach to schools screening and assessment of children with potential visual problems. This would involve referral from the service to participating practices for refraction (cycloplegic) and follow-up – or referral to Paediatric Ophthalmology/Orthoptics. The pathway is more or less complete, but there are still a few issues in other areas of Lancashire to resolve before this can become part of the IES.

Training is one area where we have benefitted from funding from Health Education NW, and 12 practitioners are now working towards the Independent Prescribing qualification. There will be more places available next year, and the training may be expanded to cover other qualifications, such as the Glaucoma certification/diploma, but that isn't set in stone. There will be more CET evenings to cover some of the pathways, though – in particular, AMD and (as mentioned) Low Vision.

You will notice on the Agenda for this year's AGM that two items concern the LOC itself – one, a change of name, brings us into line with the other local representative committees and reflects the new structure locally for commissioning being developed. The other is the need to adopt a new Constitution for the committee – part of a nation-wide shift in LOC structure to reflect the changes

in optics and contracting over the past few years. It also brings us into line with other LOCs in the North West – and in the future, closer ties with Greater Manchester and especially North & West Lancashire/South Cumbria are inevitable. We work very closely with N&W Lancs/SC as part of the Local Eye Health Network – which has brought about the Children’s Vision Pathway, as well as meeting NHS England on contractual matters and representing Lancashire on the Performance Action Group and Performer’s List Decision Panel.

The NHS structures across the years have always been subject to a (roughly) 5-year cycle, but the need to save money in the NHS has prompted a more significant, early, review of all services and how to do them “better”. A wholesale audit of EVERYTHING is currently taking place, as part of the country-wide revision, called the Sustainability and Transformation Planning. The current CCG areas have been bundled into regions to facilitate this – we are in one of five Lancashire areas (Pennine Lancashire), covering our two CCGs – within this structure, we have the opportunity to represent optical practices and present ourselves as part of the solution. The IES and the Bay area BCT programme are at the leading edge of services designed to move patients out of Secondary Care and into Primary, and have been presented at the national and international levels as new models of care designed to meet the needs of the changing, ageing, population. No doubt you’ll hear more about STPs in our regular bulletins, but, for now, the process is still in its’ infancy.

Once again, my thanks go to the LOC – especially those who have worked hard this year to develop the new services and to assess/take part in the training for both new and existing practitioners. Jawad Malik and Mark Jinson have worked tirelessly in developing and keeping the IES moving, and thanks go also to James Bontoft, David Cleasby, Zunaid Ally, David Gould and Daisy Green for their invaluable help in meetings and discussion. My gratitude also goes to Nynisha Patel for her sterling work in setting up all the training and assessment events we have held, and to Ceri Smyth-Jaynes for the support through the website and running an excellent MECS refresher.

However, we could not work on your behalf without the support of several key members of the LOC; as the Treasurer, Mark keeps us on a steady financial footing and his budget this year looks to hold onto our stable position whilst giving back some of the contributions you make to enable us to work on your behalf. The bulk of the work of the LOC’s business falls on the shoulders of the Secretary, David Noblett, and it is he who deserves the credit for keeping the LOC working and moving forward – without David, the committee would struggle to achieve what it has done over the past 12 or so years!

My final thanks go to Stuart Ingleby, who has been Vice Chair of the committee for 8 years, but is retiring from that position. He has served on various committees over the years, liaising with the CCGs and ELHT prior to our development of the IES, and was instrumental in the design of the service at the outset. He has been the lead in discussions with Blackburn with Darwen CCG, and has sat on the Performance Action Group and Performer’s List Decision Panel many times on our behalf. He has also taken on the burden of having to attend the National Optometric Conference on a least four occasions, for which he deserves a medal (for stamina, at least). His presence and sage advice on the committee will be sorely missed – thank you, Stuart.

So, please keep looking at the LOC website (www.elloc.org.uk – no change of name yet!) for updates as to what is happening and for news of forthcoming events and meetings; thank YOU for your support over the past year, and (we hope) for the future!