

Humberside and North Yorkshire ICB - Optometry Blood Pressure Screening Pilot

Background and Scope

This pilot expanded on the phase one pilot, designed by the ICB Optical Advisor and North East Lincolnshire LOC. The phase two NHSE funded pilot involved 56 optometry practices across a diverse region (including deprived and affluent areas). It ran alongside a Phase two dental pilot.

Service Delivery

- The pilot was designed for case finding among patients attending for sight tests, not for walk-ins or accompanying family/friends.
- Blood pressure (BP) checks were offered to patients aged 40 years+ or under 40 years with risk factors, provided they had no hypertension diagnosis or BP check in the past year. Patients were identified at booking, on arrival or during their eye exam.
- Practices could not advertise the service to attract people solely for BP checks.
- Multiple staff roles (receptionists, optical assistants, optometrists, etc.) could introduce the service but the training was aimed at optometrists to deliver the service.

Evidence of Impact

- 187 blood pressure assessments undertaken over the 11 month pilot.
- 68 people signposted for further investigation, nine via the urgent pathway.
- **Patient Satisfaction:**

Over half of the surveyed patients were satisfied or very satisfied with receiving BP checks during their eye appointment.

Over half strongly agreed that integrating BP checks into eye exams was a good idea.

Challenges and Positive Solutions

Patient Selection and Referral Limitations

- Challenge: Practices reported confusion over eligibility criteria and some optometry practices struggled to maintain momentum to engage with the service due to difficulties identifying suitable patients.
- Several areas had few participating pharmacies for onward referral, limiting the service's reach. There was confusion regarding referring to the GP for onward investigation.
- Some staff (especially receptionists) are reluctant to ask questions or struggle to fit blood pressure (BP) monitoring into their workflow.
- Solution: Provide targeted staff training to build confidence around eligibility criteria and alternative referral pathways when pharmacies are unavailable. LOCs and LPCs could support partnerships collaboration with nearby opticians and pharmacies, explore alternative referral pathways (such as community clinics), and advocate for increased local pharmacy participation in BP screening services.

Limited Space for Private Questionnaires

- Challenge: Small practices often have only one test room and lack private space, making staff uncomfortable when asking sensitive questions in public waiting areas.
- Solution: Consider undertaking the initial questionnaires over the phone at point of appointment booking or reminder calls, schedule those interested and eligible for blood pressure testing appointments during quieter times or offer digital questionnaires that patients can complete at home or in a private area.

Complex Access to Recording Mechanisms

- Challenge: Accessing the recording system (Pharmoutcomes) requires multiple steps and dual factor authorisation, which can be time-consuming.
- Solution: Simplify registration and access procedures where possible, offer clear step-by-step guides, and ensure technical support is readily available to assist staff.

Practice Experiences

An Independent Opticians, Knaresborough

A patient (GH, male, late 50s) awaiting major surgery had his high BP detected by his optometrist, leading to rapid diagnosis and treatment. This allowed his operation to proceed as planned, demonstrating the service's potential to deliver timely health interventions.

Specsavers Ripon

A woman in Ripon attended an urgent eye care appointment at Specsavers due to blurred vision. During the visit, the Optometrist measured her blood pressure and found it dangerously high (190/120). Emergency weekend access protocol was followed and she was immediately referred to A&E, where she received emergency treatment. This case highlights the value of integrating blood pressure checks into eye health services for timely detection and intervention.

Optometrist: "We always encourage our community to have regular eye health checks as they're not only imperative to assessing eye health but can also help the diagnosis of other health conditions such as diabetes, dementia and possible blood clots."

Patient feedback: "I'm incredibly grateful to the optometrist and her team's reactivity to my case. It was concerning and knowing they were on hand to help me with a quick diagnosis has helped me manage a potentially dangerous condition by receiving my medication quickly from the NHS."