

Resolving Issues with HES Voucher Non-Payments: North Central London LOC



This case study outlines the work taken by North Central London LOC (NCL LOC) to resolve issues surrounding the non-payment of Hospital Eye Services (HES) vouchers in their area.

NCL LOC had been receiving an increasing number of complaints from performers and contractors who had not received payment for HES vouchers, with some delays stretching back months or, on occasion, years. Despite attempts by practices to contact the local Trust, many had not received responses.

The lack of payment left some contractors and performers considering whether to stop accepting the HES vouchers or whether to pursue the matter through small claims court. This pertained to ongoing lack of payments which the LOC had previously escalated to the ICB.

Recognising the potential impact on patient care and practitioner finances, the LOC wanted to find a solution before the situation escalated further.

Description of the Intervention

Before approaching the Trust, NCL LOC contacted their constituents to understand the extent of the issue and gather more information about the challenges faced.

Initially, NCL LOC met with the clinical lead for ophthalmology at the local Trust, with whom they already had a positive working relationship. In this meeting, the LOC outlined the extent of the issues and highlighted potential risks caused by non-payments.

Following this, the clinical lead arranged a meeting with the Trusts finance department, including a senior finance manager, and the LOC to address the matter directly.

Ahead of the meeting, NCL LOC collected outcomes from practitioners and gathered evidence of the non-payments, which were compiled into a bundle to present.

The purpose of the meeting was to understand the difficulties the hospital was facing in processing the forms and to explain the impact the non-payment was having on practitioners. At the meeting, the finance department and the LOC agreed a draft protocol to resolve the issues.

Following the meeting, the accounts department shared a final draft of the protocol which the LOC reviewed and amended. The revised document was then circulated to the LOC, who held a further meeting to discuss and finalise it.

Agreed Protocol

The meeting with the Trust resulted in the following agreed protocol:

- Providers were to submit the fully completed HES (P) 3 Spectacles Voucher. This had to include a valid signature and be dated by the practitioner.
- Part one and two of the form had to be filled out appropriately before the provider could submit the HES (P) 3 Spectacles Voucher to the accounts department at the Trust.
- The provider then submits the HES (P) 3 form by email only and not by post. Once the accounts department received the HES (P) 3 forms, this was then loaded onto the ledger manually and processed.
 - Accounts Payable (AP) need to use the date of the email as the invoice date.
 - AP need to use the date of when the spectacles were received, as stated on part two of the form along with initials of the patient, as the invoice number. For example: 19/10/2023JB and coded to 52815 – 3610. This step was important in resolving one of the main causes of the delay, as the hospital required an invoice date for payment and there was confusion over which date should be used.
- Once the data is entered on hospital's ledger, the invoice (voucher) is then forwarded onto a nominated person at the Trust for approval. If there are any discrepancies with the value or services they will use the dispute code on the ledger with a note of the discrepancy. An email will then be sent to the provider, with the accounts payable officer copied in.
- Once the invoice was approved for payment this would then be picked up on the payment run when due. As there are no payment terms on the voucher the invoices will be treated as a 30-day payment terms.

The ultimate aim of this process was to ensure that invoices were turned around within 48 hours of receiving the vouchers by email, and for payments to be made 30 days from the date they received the email from the provider.

Outcomes

The change in process ensured that contractors received payments on time and created a much smoother and reliable process.

By instigating a meeting to discuss the challenges that resulted in non-payment, the LOC was able to maintain and further strengthen its relationships with their local Trust, resulting in benefits for both organisations.

Conversations continued after the initial meeting to ensure that the process remained effective and appropriate. If the process failed or issues arose, additional meetings were arranged promptly to address and resolve the problem.