

**October 2012**

**To all Optometrists,  
 Dispensing Opticians and  
 Ophthalmic Medical Practitioners  
 Providing General Ophthalmic Services**

**Dear Colleague**

**Re: GOS Sight Tests Intervals**

Please read the following revised guidance on MINIMUM intervals for GOS Sight Tests. The Department of Health provides guidance on the frequency of GOS Sight Tests. **Please now disregard MOS 270 and ensure that you and all your staff are fully aware of the information in this MOS.**

In normal circumstances the BSO will accept for payment, sight test claims as follows:

<b>Patients Age</b>	<b>Previous Sight Test Undertaken</b>
0-15 years not needing an Rx	At least one year previously
0-15 years needing an Rx	At least six months previously
16-19 years not needing an Rx	At least two years previously
16-19 years needing an Rx	At least one years previously
20-70 years	At least two years previously
Over 70 years	At least one year previously

For patients with certain medical conditions, the minimum period between sight tests should normally be:

Patients with Diabetes	At least one year
Patients with Glaucoma	At least one year
Patients with Cataracts	At least one year
Patients 40 years old and over with a family history of Glaucoma or Ocular Hypertension	At least one year

***Providing Support to Health and Social Care***

**Please read the following additional guidance carefully as it has also been updated since the previous MOS 270 issued in October**

## **Clinical Judgement**

Optometrists should, however, use their clinical judgement to determine when a sight test is clinically necessary. The above guidance sets out the circumstances under which the BSO will normally accept a claim for payment without further justification. As required by the Regulations, you should only carry out a sight test, if you think it is clinically necessary. While you have complete freedom to exercise your clinical judgement in individual cases, it is not appropriate to routinely apply re-call intervals to patients which are outside the DoH guidance. HSCB/BSO has the discretion to ask you to justify each individual decision.

You should ensure that the reason for the test is clearly shown on the patient's record and the GOS claim form. General Ophthalmic Services Regulations require a contractor to -

“satisfy himself that the testing of sight is necessary”  
(2007 Regulations, Sight Test applications, 17 (4 (c))).

In satisfying yourself that a GOS sight test is necessary you must use your clinical judgement to determine how frequently a patient needs a sight test and to determine when to issue a changed prescription. Consideration must be given to the stated recommended DoH minimum sight test intervals and current evidence of best practice. This guidance specifies the minimum intervals between sight tests expected for different categories of patients.

**Any GOS ST claim submitted for a sight test that has been carried out more than two weeks earlier than the recommended minimum interval is classified as an early test and therefore must have the clinical reason for the early test noted on the claim form.**

## **Domiciliary Eye Examinations**

An ophthalmic contractor can only claim a domiciliary fee in respect of a patient who is eligible for a GOS sight test and requires a sight test at the place where they normally reside. Both the ophthalmic contractor and his or her patient have a responsibility to ensure that the domiciliary visit is necessary.

**Please Note: In line with other GOS sight tests, domiciliary eye examinations will not be permitted before the recommended time interval and contractors should not give notification for a sight test earlier than is appropriate for that patient.**

## Early Retests

In the event of testing a patient's sight at a shorter interval than that specified by the HSCB/BSO, you must write the actual clinical reason for the early sight test in the remarks box on the GOS (NI) ST forms. If this is not included the form will be returned, delaying payment. More detailed justification should be stated clearly on the patient record cards.

The facility for early re-tests is for cases where a GOS sight test needs to be carried out before the recommended minimum time interval. This has been designed to allow provision of GOS for patients who present with eye problems which cannot be predicted and planned for e.g. sudden loss /change of vision or sudden onset of diplopia. In particular, the testing of children earlier than the recommended DoH intervals must be supported by appropriate clinical reasons. General medical practitioners have been updated with this information.

## GOS Sight Tests under 3 months

In exceptional circumstances where a GOS test is required within three months of a previous test, prior approval from the Business Services Organisation must be sought before the test is carried out.

Approval for early re-tests under 3 months can be obtained by:

Telephone (028) 90535528/90535529/90535527  
Fax (028) 90535634  
Email [Angela.Dowds@hscni.net](mailto:Angela.Dowds@hscni.net)

An approval number will be issued by BSO which must be noted in the remarks box of the GOS (NI) ST form. If a form is submitted for a retest at an interval of less than 3 months from the previous sight test without approval having been obtained, it cannot be paid.

## GOS Sight Tests for Children under 16yrs

The HSCB/BSO would ask that you note the recommended minimum intervals for GOS sight tests for a child less than 16yrs of age. A child under 16 years of age not requiring a prescription should normally be examined at intervals of not less than 12 months. Children under 16 years of age who require a prescription should not normally be examined at intervals of less than 6 months.

**PLEASE NOTE:** 3 month recalls are not in line with DoH guidance and should not be routinely used.

## **Date of Last Sight Test**

The GOS Regulations state that it is the responsibility of the practitioner to obtain the date of the last sight test from the patient or their parent/guardian/carer and to make a decision, based on this and clinical information, as to whether the patient should have a further GOS sight test. This applies equally when providing domiciliary eyecare. It is important that the “Date of last test” section on the GOS (NI)ST form is completed.

Please note the following has been extracted from the General Ophthalmic Services Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007:-

- (1) A contractor to whom an application for a testing of sight is made shall, before making any test of the person’s sight—
- (a) subject to paragraph (5) —
    - (i) satisfy himself that the person is an eligible person by asking for satisfactory evidence of entitlement, unless the contractor, in cases other than where the patient is a person specified in regulation 16(1)(d), already has satisfactory evidence of it available to him; and
    - (ii) where the patient has been asked for but not produced satisfactory evidence that he is an eligible person, then the contractor shall record the fact on the patient’s sight test form;
  - (b) ensure that particulars of the patient and the approximate date of the last testing, if any, of his sight are inserted in a sight test form by the patient or on his behalf; and
  - (c) satisfy himself that the testing of sight is necessary.