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To: Regional Health Authorities)
District Health Authorities)
Special Health Authorities)for action
for London Post-Graduate)
Teaching Hospitals)

Your reference

Our reference

HES/106

Date

// February 1988

Dear General Manager

I am writing to let you know of changes we propose making to the NHS (Payments for Optical Appliances) Regulations 1986.

Changes are to be made to the Social Security system which, so far as the optical voucher scheme is concerned, affect mainly the descriptions of benefits and the manner in which claims for help from people in the low income full/partial remission category are assessed. For all practical purposes, these changes will have little effect on the operation of the voucher scheme, although some forms for use in both the GOS and the HES will need to be amended in consequence. The Regulations will also require amendment. Under the new arrangements, three groups will be eligible for vouchers -

- a. Those receiving income support (replacing supplementary benefit);
- b. those receiving family credit (replacing family income supplement); and
- c. those claiming help on low income grounds.

With regard to the low income group, under the new arrangements anybody applying successfully for help with any type of NHS charge (eg dental charges and charges for wigs and fabric supports) will also receive notification of their entitlement to help with all other charges, including vouchers. This notification will remain current for six months and individuals will be free to seek help according to that notification at any time throughout that period.

This arrangement should be particularly helpful to optical patients as those already in possession of a notification will be spared the delays inherent in the current procedures. I should also add that we can, in fact, anticipate some significant improvement in the turn-round of initial claims now that low income claim work has been centralised at the Agency Benefit Unit in Newcastle.

Full details of the new arrangements will be published as soon as possible and the intention is that these will come into operation on 11 April this year. However, we are also taking this opportunity to make other changes set out below which will take effect from 1 April.

There has been some confusion over the appropriate time to issue a voucher to a patient who has requested one and we intend, therefore, to amend Regulation 4(2) to make clear that, as with the GOS prescription, the voucher needs to be provided immediately after the completion of the sight test.

We intend to introduce a provision to clarify the position on the power which determines the voucher value code of bifocals. As you know, we are currently using the expedient of calculating the voucher value taking into account the reading addition. We propose, however, to revert to arrangements akin to those used before July 1986 whereby the voucher value for bifocals will be determined by the distance segment of the lens.

We recognise that some anomalies with voucher values can occur with transposed prescriptions. This only seems to happen in a relatively small number of cases and, as far as we can see, any alternative approach to defining voucher bands may not be without its own difficulties. We will keep the position under review but do not propose to make any changes at this time. However, we would welcome any comments you may have on this problem.

As you know from the White Paper 'Promoting Better Health', the Government intends to enable vouchers prescribed for spectacles in either the GOS or the HES to be used against the cost of contact lenses if patients so wish. The necessary changes to the Regulations to allow for this will be made. This arrangement does not affect the HES arrangements for the supply of contact lenses on clinical grounds which remain unaltered.

The voucher values are being reconsidered at present. We envisage that the new values will become effective from 1 April.

A letter in similiar terms has also been sent to those concerned with the GOS.

Yours sincerely



MISS P M C WINTERTON

This letter will be cancelled on 12 February 1989.

Warrington Health Authority	
12 FEB 1989	
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