**STAFFORDSHIRE LOCAL OPTICAL COMMITTEE**

**GUIDANCE ON EYE EXAMINATIONS FOR CHILDREN**

1. If an Optometrist is registered with the PCT to conduct GOS sight tests, then under current legislation, it is a breach of contract to refuse any eligible patient the opportunity of an NHS eye examination on grounds of age, race, gender, religions, social class, sexual orientation, appearance, disability or medical or ophthalmic condition. (New GOS contract Part 9, Clause 39).
2. This does not prevent a practitioner from referring or recommending a patient to see another practitioner who may have particular skills or a special interest in, a particular group of patients or patients with a particular condition, with the patient’s agreement. So, if an Optometrist does feel they are not confident in their own ability/experience (or other valid reason) to examine a young child, then it would be their professional obligation to refer that child to another Optometrist who has the appropriate experience/confidence. If in North Staffordshire, they could refer to the list of Paediatric Shared Care Optometrists and choose the most convenient one for the patient.
3. In North Staffordshire, Optometrists can now refer children directly to the Orthoptist (UHNS) using a GOS 18 form, if any further investigation/management is required, after completing the Eye Examination.
4. Parents do have the right to take their child to any GOS contractor for this examination. The right of an Optometrist to refuse to see a patient remains, but if exceptionally, the contractor does have to refuse GOS to a patient, other than because the patient is not eligible for an NHS sight test, they must record this information and make it available to the PCT on request.
5. The College of Optometrists guidelines and AOP are a good source for what clinical standards are required from Optometrists and the legal consequences would be for refusing to see a particular class of patient.
6. It is worth reminding ourselves that eye problems can occur at any age and parents cannot always tell if their child has an eye/vision problem. A child will not complain about their eyes/vision in the same way as an adult. It is vital to remember that the first 7-8 years of life are crucial for normal visual development of that child and will greatly influence the quality of life for that child. As Optometrists, we play a primary role in detection and management of children’s visual problems.
7. Lastly, it is also worth remembering that children under 16, must be dispensed and fitted with spectacles by a registered Optician. Unqualified staff may be involved if they are under direct supervision of a registered Optician.

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