Outline of the Welsh Low Vision Service

The Welsh Primary Care Low Vision Service is funded by the Welsh Assembly Government and organised by Carmarthenshire Local Health Board (LHB). It was established in 2004. This Service Manual outlines how the service should work.

The Service Providers

The service is provided in optometric practices. Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians with an ABDO Low Vision qualification undertake the low vision assessments and follow-up.

33 experienced practitioners were accredited for the first year (after which they are required to undertake training and accreditation).

Other practitioners taking part in the scheme must have undertaken training and be accredited by the School of Optometry and Vision Sciences, Cardiff University before commencing provision.

A list of participating optometric practices can be obtained from Carmarthenshire LHB (see contact details Appendix 6). Registration in the scheme is via practitioner not practice.
Access to the Service

The service should be close to the person's home and easy to access.

**Referral routes**
Referral to the service can be made by:

- Ophthalmologists
- GPs
- Optometrists
- Social Workers
- Rehabilitation Workers
- Relatives
- Patients themselves

**Referral criteria**
All those with an impairment of visual function for whom full remediation is not possible (by conventional spectacles, contact lenses or medical intervention) and which causes restriction in their everyday lives are entitled to use the service.

All those with distance visual acuity of 6/12 or worse, and/or near acuity of N6 or worse (with a plus 4 dioptre reading addition) or significantly constricted visual fields can access the service automatically. People with an impairment of visual function outside these parameters may access the service if prior consent is received from The Consultant Optometric Advisor to the Welsh Assembly Government (see contact details in Appendix 6). This mechanism has been put in place to stop abuse of the service and not to hinder anyone using it.

**Waiting times**
Ninety percent of patients should be seen within two weeks of referral.

Clinical Diagnosis and Registration

Normal terms of service for referral to an ophthalmologist of undiagnosed new disease or change in disease state apply. Referral to ophthalmologists should also be made to certify that a person is eligible to be registered as blind or partially sighted.
Protocol for Appointments

Practitioners should set aside sessions for low vision appointments rather than fitting them into their normal clinic lists.

Dispensing Opticians accredited to provide a low vision service must work alongside an optometrist who will undertake the examination of any ocular pathology and/or refraction as part of the low vision assessment or follow-up. The optometrist must also countersign any orders or prescriptions for spectacle mounted low vision aids.

Sight Test

Anyone entering the service should have had a sight test within the last year. Most people using the service will be entitled to an NHS sight test.

The low vision assessment

A low vision assessment will be provided to everyone using the service. (It should be noted that this is not a sight test and may not include an eye health check although spectacles may be prescribed).

Follow up appointments

Patients should be followed up after the initial low vision assessment according to their individual needs. The following are guidelines derived from audit of other services:

- 2 months if first low vision aid loaned
- 6 months if additional low vision aid loaned
- 12 months if no change to low vision aids
- On request if no change from last annual appointment or if no low vision aids required.

Home visits

Where a domiciliary fee is considered necessary as a follow-up to the prescribing of low vision aids then an additional fee will be paid. Further details will be provided shortly.
The Record Card

Practitioners should use the standard record card (Appendix 1) provided.

The Low Vision Record Cards should be stored securely in the practice where the low vision assessment took place. NHS guidelines for maintaining patient confidentiality should be adhered to at all times and staff handling the records should be aware of their responsibilities in protecting and using the information the record cards contain.

The following information on the record card must be completed in order to receive payment:

- Date of the appointment.
- Whether the appointment is an assessment or a follow up, new or old.
- Patients details (name, address (including postcode) and date of birth)
- Practitioner details (name and GOC number)
- Practice address, including postcode
- All tick boxes that apply to the person including at least one tick box in each list.
- Binocular distance and near VA or vision upon entering the service
- Best corrected distance and near VAs following assessment
- Low Vision Aids ordered and the VA with them.
- Details of consent to use information at the end of the record card.

Equipment

To assess the visual function of people using the low vision service equipment is provided to participating accredited practitioners (Appendix 2).

One set of equipment only will be provided per practice. A named individual in each practice will be responsible for the equipment and its upkeep.
Carmarthenshire LHB will keep a register of those responsible for the equipment. It is the responsibility of the practitioner to inform Carmarthenshire LHB of any change in circumstances.
Demonstrating and ordering low vision aids (LVAs)

Optical and non-optical LVAs are available to people using the service.

**Demonstration kits**

A demonstration kit of optical and non-optical LVAs is provided as part of the scheme (Appendix 3). As with the equipment, a named individual in each practice will be responsible for the kit and Carmarthenshire LHB will keep a register of these practitioners. It is the responsibility of the practitioner to inform Carmarthenshire LHB of any change to the arrangement in their practice.

**Ordering LVAs.**

Practitioners may order any low vision aid on the list in Appendix 3. This is done by writing the code and a brief description of the aid in the table entitled “LVAs advised and ordered” on the final page of the record card. When the record card is faxed to Carmarthenshire LHB (contact details in Appendix 6) they will order the LVAs from the supplier who will dispatch the appliance(s) directly to the practice within a few days.

If practitioners need to query anything about the order they should always contact Carmarthenshire LHB.

**Restricted Supply LVAs**

An additional list of restricted supply LVAs is provided in Appendix 3. These may be ordered by any accredited participating practitioner if prior consent is sought. Prior consent is gained by contacting The Consultant Optometric Advisor to the Welsh Assembly Government (see contact details Appendix 6).

The list enclosed in this manual is not definitive. Requests for devices not on this list will be considered.

**Additional trial kits**

Additional trial kits are available for distance and near telescopic devices. These are available for practitioners to try with patients before ordering. To borrow these trial kits practitioners need to contact Carmarthenshire LHB.
Issuing and recycling LVAs

LVAs are issued on loan to the patient and those returned will be recycled.

**Issuing LVAs**

Practitioners should write the practice address on one of the labels provided (Appendix 3) and attach it to the appliance before it is issued to the patient.

When an LVA is issued to a patient the practitioner should insert any batteries required and/or ensure it is working. It may be necessary to remind the person how the device should be used.

- The patient needs to sign the Low Vision Aid Examination Claim Form (Appendix 5) when they have received an LVA. This form should be sent to Carmarthenshire LHB. If an aid is dispensed after a follow-up appointment for a patient for whom a claim has already been submitted only the Patient section and Equipment Requisition section of the Low Vision Aid Examination Claim Form (Appendix 5) needs to be completed.

**Recycling LVAs**

If an LVA is no longer required it should be returned to the practice that issued it. The practice should send the appliance(s) with a return form (Appendix 3) to Carmarthenshire LHB (address in Appendix 6).

The Local Health Board will send the LVAs back to the supplier who will ensure they are in good working order and clean. They will then dispatch them the next time an order for that device is received.
Providing a Holistic Service

In order to address all the needs of people using the service referral to other agencies and sharing information with others will be essential.

*Sharing Information the Vision Passport*

The Vision Passport (Appendix 4) allows information to be shared with the person using the service and other agencies. Everyone using the service for the first time should be issued with a Vision Passport (unless they request otherwise). Information from assessment and follow-up appointments should be recorded in the relevant section.

Patients should be informed about the purpose of the Vision Passport and advised to take it to all their appointments and present it to practitioners concerned with their vision.

A slightly different version is being piloted in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan. Practitioners in these areas should use the pilot Vision Passport when it becomes available.

*Referral to other agencies*

Referral to other agencies will be necessary. Each practice should compile a list of services available in their area including Social Services, Education Services, Employment Services and Voluntary Organisations.

Patients should be informed about who they are being referred to and reason for any referrals should be explained. Patients need to tick the appropriate box at the end of the record card and sign to give informed consent for information in the record to be used in the referrals to other agencies. This is best done at the end of the consultation by the practitioner.

*Low Vision Therapy*

It is hoped that a low vision therapy element will be added to the service in due course.

*Children's Advocate*

A Children's Low Vision Advocate has been appointed to assist children with low vision and their families. Contact details are available in Appendix 6.
Monitoring

Practitioners wishing to provide the service should be aware that the service will be closely audited and researched in order to ensure its effective and efficient operation. Full co-operation with this process is expected.

As part of the monitoring, all adults using the service should be issued with a questionnaire and a stamped addressed envelope to complete and return before they attend for an assessment appointment (Appendix 7). Payment of the fee requires this to be done.

Practitioners should ensure that their patients are happy for their information to be used for these purposes and record their consent at the end of the record card.

Payment of Practitioners

A fee of £67 will be paid to practitioners for a low vision assessment and as many follow-ups as are required in a year. Included in this fee is payment for writing referral letters and reports and all administrative time and postal costs required to operate the service as outlined in this Service Manual.

In order to receive payment the following steps should be followed:

1) A questionnaire (Appendix 7) and stamped addressed envelope should be given to (adult) patients to complete prior to the assessment appointment.

2) A Vision Passport should be issued to the patient upon completion of an assessment.

3) The record card with all the necessary information provided (as outlined previously) should be faxed to Carmarthenshire LHB.

4) Once the person has received their LVA(s) they should sign the Low Vision Aid Examination Claim Form (Appendix 5).

5) The claim form should be sent to Carmarthenshire LHB.

6) If further LVAs are dispensed at follow-up visits the patient section and equipment requisition section of the Low Vision Aid Examination Claim Form (Appendix 5) should be completed and the patient should sign to acknowledge receipt of any LVAs. The form sent to Carmarthenshire LHB.
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