

Buckinghamshire Priorities Committee

Policy Statement: Cataract Removal in Adults – threshold for referral for surgery

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Cataract is a common condition of later life, caused by clouding of the lens of the eye. If left untreated, cataracts can cause a gradual loss of clarity of vision, which may have a significant impact on the quality of life of many people. Currently the only effective treatment is surgical removal and replacement of the affected lens. Cataract Surgery is the most commonly performed operation in the UK (over 311,000 in 2007-08), with numbers doubling over ten years from 1997-98 to 2007-08.

Visual acuity provides an incomplete assessment of the impact of a cataract on an individual patient, therefore a more patient centred approach is recommended.

When considering referring a patient for cataract surgery the following thresholds must be met to ensure that surgery is a cost effective intervention:

- 1) The cataract must be sufficient enough to account for the visual symptoms (visual loss or disturbance) experienced by the patient. Alternative causes for the reported visual symptoms should be excluded prior to referring a patient for cataract surgery.
- 2) The cataract and visual symptoms experienced by the patient should negatively affect the patient's lifestyle. The following are examples of considerations for this threshold:
 - a. Significant glare or dazzle in daylight due to lens opacities
 - b. Difficulty with night vision due to lens opacities particularly if driving
 - c. A requirement for good vision for employment purposes
 - d. Difficulty reading
 - e. Significant Anisometropia/ Aniseikonia
 - f. Management of other coexisting eye conditions, including DRSS ungradable photograph
 - g. Refractive error primarily due to cataract
- 3) The patient must understand the general pros, cons and risks of surgery.
- 4) The patient must want to undertake the surgery when all the above is considered.

This information together with a report from the most recent sight test should be included in the referral to secondary care (using the agreed proforma).

Only optometrists who have undertaken the necessary training and accreditation from NHS Buckinghamshire may refer using the Direct Access Cataract Scheme using the thresholds outlined above.

The same thresholds will apply for second eye surgery.