



Running an 'Open Session' at an Optical Practice:

GUIDE FOR LOC CHAIRS

(England Version)



Central (Local Optical Committee) Fund

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(LOCSU)
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1. Introduction

This guide provides you with information and guidance to raise the profile of local eye health care issues and the role of local optical practices with politicians, local eye health stakeholders and the media through an open session held at a practice.

2. Objectives of an open session

Primary

- To brief key local opinion formers (i.e. MPs, eye health stakeholders etc.) on the health benefits of regular sight tests and to highlight the high levels of avoidable sight loss which can be prevented through regular sight tests and screening services,
- To achieve far greater recognition of the importance of eye health and the need for regular sight testing amongst the wider healthcare community (e.g. GPs, community nurses & PCT representatives).
- To inform local MPs, PCT commissioners and GPs about the current range of services on offer, and also about the significant opportunity to increase the number of locally commissioned services, particularly glaucoma management services to improve access and relieve pressure on hospitals and GPs.

Secondary

- To demonstrate the value of local community optician practices.
- To raise the profile of eye health in the local media, which can be further utilised by the LOC in the future.

2. Tactics

Open sessions are an excellent way for Local Optical Committees (LOCs) to showcase exemplary opticians and services in their area. These sessions should raise awareness of the services currently on offer from local opticians – particularly the wider health benefits of sight testing about which most opinion formers, like the general public, are hopelessly ignorant - and demonstrate the value that they provide to their community. There are clear benefits in highlighting the services currently offered by opticians, not least because it will also contribute to the discussions regarding the potential for opticians to play an enhanced role in eye healthcare following the recent contract negotiations.

Targeted media, MPs, Local Optometric Advisors, eye health organisations (e.g. RNIB), patient groups and PCT commissioners should be invited to

attend these events, as well as patients who are willing to talk about their experiences and can provide evidence of the benefits of visiting their local opticians. Additionally, it may be worth inviting local councillors (particularly those who serve on Councils' Overview and Scrutiny Committees, which can examine health issues) and GPs, depending on the circumstances.

It is recommended that the practices/ stores showcased are those which have a story to tell, for example, one with a local patient who was diagnosed with glaucoma during a routine eye test or a patient who has attended a practice for a significant number of years, make good 'human interest' stories, which a journalist should want to write about.

An additional and important tactic is to also select practices which are in high impact constituencies. These are:

- where the MP has shown an interest in eye healthcare in the past (e.g. Sandra Gidley MP, who is the Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Eye Health);
- where the local MP has a ministerial or opposition frontbench portfolio (e.g. Andrew Lansley MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Health); and
- in marginal seats, where the sitting MP and Prospective Parliamentary Candidates (PPCs) will be vying for attention

3. Key messages

To help ensure that the local practice and the LOC gains as much advantage from the open session as possible, it will be important to have three or four clear points to communicate to the politicians and other invited stakeholders. Having three or four structured points which you keep reiterating during the course of the visit will help the MP to recall the essential facts more easily in the future. Ahead of any open session it will therefore be crucial to work out what the 'key messages' will be for the visit, and ensure you have some key facts to support them. These should then be used when talking to the MP and other guests, as well as the media. Some overarching key messages include:

- *There are currently two million people in the UK who are at risk of losing their sight and half of this is avoidable; we therefore need to make the general public aware of the need to look after their eye health and go for regular sight tests.*
- *Optical practices are convenient and highly accessible offering a growing range and choice of eye health care services to patients.*

- *Local community opticians are ideally placed to provide NHS patients with wider services (beyond the sight test) and are willing and able to play an enhanced role in eye healthcare, especially following the recent contract negotiations.*

LOCs should adapt and add locally relevant key messages, dependent on the status of the relationship between the LOC and the PCT and other health professionals. However, remember that your MP is unlikely to be a specialist in eye healthcare and we recommend that you keep your points at a level which a layman would understand so be careful not to go into too much detail as you will lose your MP!

4. Planning considerations

The strength of the optician/ optometrist used as the host for the open session will be critical to ensuring a successful event. Accordingly, any practices showcased need to include:

- Effective optical spokespeople who are able to give measurable examples of success and patient benefits from the services offered;
- Effective patient advocates who can act as spokespeople by talking about their experience and how they have benefited from the services provided by their local opticians/ optometrists. This will provide journalists and MPs with the 'human interest' story vital to generating interest amongst, respectively, their readership and in Parliament.

The 'tone' for the open session should be a positive one highlighting the professionalism of opticians/ optometrists, the positive work done, but that there is significant under-utilisation of the eye health professional on England's high streets. It should not be an opportunity to complain about the local PCT or other healthcare professionals.

5. Target invitees

The following stakeholders should be encouraged to attend the open days:

- **Relevant local media** – this will allow journalists to get to know local opticians and their concerns. MPs are also more likely to attend if their visit will be reported in their constituency's local press.
- **Local MPs and councillors** – the open session provides LOCs and opticians/ optometrists with the opportunity to engage with local politicians directly, but it will provide an additional reason for local journalists to write about the open session.

- **Local PCT representatives** (and the Local Optometric Advisor) – the open session will provide opticians/ optometrists and the LOC with a great opportunity to raise awareness of the service provision opportunity available to the PCT.
- **Other local healthcare professionals (i.e. GPs and community nurses)** – inviting local GPs and other healthcare practitioners is a good way of building positive professional relationships with them and to show MPs and the PCT that positive relationships do exist and can be built on in the future. It will also help present the local optician/ optometrist in a more professional standing.
- **Relevant eye health charities and patient groups** – if there are any local eye health charities in your area it is worth inviting them along so that they can join in the discussion.

6. How to go about setting up an open day

In the first instance, the relevant LOC should identify the practices to be showcased; once selected, these opticians/ optometrists should then be able to identify suitable patient advocates. Outlined below is a *suggested* process for setting up the open session.

This guide contains material and templates which will significantly reduce the amount of time needed to plan a session:

Materials and documentation to support the running of an open session include:

- Core messaging for opticians/ optometrists and patients with FAQ
- Template invitation to local MPs (and councillors)
- Template invitation to PCT representatives/ GPs/ local organisations
- Template invitation to patients
- Media invite/ calling notice template
- Press pack template for media attendees on the day
- Template for MP biography
- Template thank you letters to MPs
- Template for draft press release

LOCs: Drawing up a shortlist

1. Identify any opticians/ optometrists in your area which you think are examples of best practice in eye healthcare.
2. Identify the MPs who represent the constituencies where these practices/ stores are located. Type in the practice postcode to the parliament website to locate the MP:
<http://findyourmp.parliament.uk/commons/>
3. Check whether any of the MPs:
 - a. have shown an interest in eye health in the past,
 - b. hold Ministerial and Shadow Ministerial rolesUse the website www.theyworkforyou.com to help you in your research. If you find any 'strategic' MP in your area, try to find a practice in their constituency which would be suitable to hold an open session.
4. If you have a number of practices keen to get involved and are not sure which to prioritise, you could also check whether the MP's constituency is a politically marginal seat as if it is, they should be looking for opportunities to engage with their constituents (contact Heather Marshall or Sarah Lapham at AOP on heathermarshall@aop.org.uk or SarahLapham@aop.org.uk if you need help with this).
5. Following your research (steps 1-4), match up the best combination and finalise the practice to host the open session. You should keep a list of good possible practices which could host a future open session – or a session in a different constituency or PCT area.
6. Check that the practices you have selected are willing to hold an open session. You can assure the optometrist that their local MP represents them regardless of whether they have voted for them, so they should not feel there is anything wrong with about letting their MP know about their concerns as a constituent; that is what they are there for!

For each selected practice:

7. Prompt your selected optometrists to draft a letter inviting the relevant MP to visit their local practice (a template letter is provided as part of this guide). We recommend that this initial invitation comes from the Friday or Saturday afternoons, or Monday mornings are when MPs are most likely to be free as they are generally in Westminster at other times and have surgeries on Saturday mornings. We recommend that a variety of dates are suggested and that the MP is given the option to choose a date at their convenience. MPs receive many invitations so the optometrist should be prepared to chase up the invitation with a phone call(s) to get a response. They can call their office in either their

constituency or at the House of Commons – the numbers will be on the MP's website.

8. Once a date has been agreed with the MP, the LOC should draft letters to the Local Optometric Advisor, any other PCT representatives, GPs and local eye health organisations whom you think may be interested. Again, use the templates provided to help you.
9. Prompt your optometrist to ask some of their regular patients if they would be willing to also attend the open session and talk about their experiences. We recommend that when thinking about which patients to ask, think about whether they have a good story to tell, for example, patients who have been visiting the practice for years and have watched it develop its service provision, or patients who have had an eye disease detected during a routine appointment and the optometrist has effectively saved their sight or even diagnosed a life threatening condition such as a tumour and you have saved their life!
10. Send a 'calling notice' to your local media using the template provided. This will ensure that local journalists know in advance that you are hosting an event with local politicians, with photo opportunities. You should already have a good idea of local papers and radio stations in your area, but LOCSU can help suggest further titles if you have any doubts.

Preparation ahead of the open session:

11. Prompt the optometrist to do some research into the MP's background so that they are able to establish a rapport with them before moving on to talk about eye healthcare. The MP's biography on their website is a good place to start to find out their interests and recent activities, and a template is provided in this guide to show you the types of things they should be looking out for. Offer to help them if they need support in doing this. You could also contact the AOP and ask them to provide further information on the MP's background.
12. Prompt the optometrist to prepare a short press pack for media attendees on the day – this should include an overview of the practice, a list of those attending the open session, supplementary information on services offered and case studies of patients present. It is also useful to include contact details of the practice manager in case the journalist has any follow-up questions. A template has been provided to help them prepare this.
13. The LOC should prepare a press release for any journalists who were invited but were unable to attend on the day. Use the template provided to help you write this. If you do not know their email address, give the

publication a call and ask. Take the press release along with you on the day so you can get the MP to sign off the quote you have prepared for them.

14. Revise the key messages for eye healthcare (see above and also the FAQ document provided for how to answer questions effectively). Remember that these should not be learnt word for word, but used to give you an overview of the issues you should be raising during the open session.
15. Rehearse what you want to say to ensure you feel confident.
16. Prompt the optometrist to make sure that they can provide refreshments on the day – it is likely they won't have enough cups to offer all visitors tea so offer to bring some in from home if necessary.
17. Prompt the optometrist to make sure that all their staff are aware of when the event is taking place, who is attending and what the key messages are.
18. Prompt the optometrist to organise for one of their staff to be ready to take photos on the day or bring along your own camera. It is likely that the local press will turn up with their own photographer, but it is useful to have your own photos just in case, and you can also send them on to the MP's office to publish on his or her website. Some shots you should consider taking are:
 - a. the MP getting his or her eyes tested by the optometrist.
 - b. the MP speaking to the optician and patients – either together or at the same time. Also try to make it obvious from the background that they are at an optical store/ practice by including optical equipment in the shot.

On the day of the open session:

19. Below is a suggested timetable for the day of the open session.

XYZ opticians, DATE

PM	
	Practice/ store prepared for a visit.
13.30	LOC representative arrives.
13.35	Catch up with practice/ store manager and staff.
13.45	Case study patients arrive
14.00	Guests arrive
14.15	MP arrives
14.20	Introductions

14.25	Briefing of MP and other VIPs using the case study of patients as a way of introducing key messages into the conversation.
14.35	Photo opportunities
14.40	Media interviews
14.50	MP leaves
14.55	Media follow up with patients/optician/optometrist where required.
15.00	Media leave
15.05	De-brief with practice/ store manager.
15.15	End of session.

20. During introductions, introduce the session as an LOC event; this is important so that the MP and PCT representatives in particular do not feel that they are favouring your practice over others in the area.
21. If during the session you are asked a difficult question - don't try and answer it if you are unsure of the answer. Always offer to follow up with the answer at a later date.
22. Remember to include time during the session for the MP to have a photo of their visit to their local practice. Check that the MP is happy with the photos taken and also check that the MP is happy with the quote that you have prepared for them in the press release.

Following the event:

23. Don't forget to send the MP and other VIPs a thank you letter for attending the open session. This could come jointly from both the LOC chair and the optometrist but make sure that one of you gets this done promptly as it will allow the LOC to continue to build its relationship with the MP and hopefully the PCT, providing a further opportunity to talk about the work and potential of the optical sector. Attach to the letter a couple of good photos of the MP so that they may be uploaded to their website (if relevant).
24. Read the newspapers to see if the event makes the news! If you haven't seen coverage of your session after a week, give the journalist to whom you sent the press release a call to jog their memory.
25. Please send a copy of the thank you letter to LOCSU, plus any coverage on the event which has appeared in the local press and details of those who have attended.

7. For Further Information

If you have any further general questions, please go to the LOCSU website www.loc-net.org.uk or contact Georgina Gordon on GeorginaGordon@locsus.co.uk.

For press or political support, please contact Heather Marshall or Sarah Lapham at AOP on heathermarshall@aop.org.uk or SarahLapham@aop.org.uk.

Research sites:

www.theyworkforyou.com

www.parliament.uk

www.eyehhealthalliance.co.uk

8. Glossary

Calling notice – a note sent to journalists to let them know that an event will be taking place and to invite them to attend.

Press release – a document sent to journalists to let them know about something which will interest them and prompt them into writing a story on the subject.

Ministerial portfolio – an MP who has taken on extra responsibilities in government. Examples of ministerial titles are Secretary of State, Minister of State and Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State. Parliamentary Private Secretaries are not ministerial appointments but as the role involves tracking backbench opinion, an MP with this role would have influence.

Prospective Parliamentary Candidate (PPC) – a candidate who is not currently representing the constituency in Parliament i.e. is not the current MP, but someone who is hoping to take over as the local MP after the next General Election.

Select Committee – a committee comprising a small number of MPs which have been appointed to explore a particular area or issue.

All Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs) – groupings of politicians from all political parties who meet to discuss a particular issue.

9. Key Messages and FAQ

This document is designed to provide clarity of the key points you will want to make to the MPs and media that will be visiting your practice during the open session.

Eye Health Key Messages

- There are currently two million people in the UK who are at risk of losing their sight and half of this is avoidable; we therefore need to make the general public aware of the need to look after their eye health and go for regular sight tests.
- Optical practices are highly accessible and conveniently located, offering a growing range and choice of eye health care services to patients.
- Local community opticians are ideally placed to provide NHS patients with routine appointments (beyond the sight test) and are willing and able to play an enhanced role in eye healthcare, especially following the recent contract negotiations.

FAQ

The following FAQ is to provide you with an idea of the kind of questions the media or your visiting MP may ask. Some of the questions you will be able to answer from your own knowledge; some have sample answers provided. These answers are suggested as a guide and it is not recommended that you learn them word for word. Wherever possible, include examples of your experiences of delivering services in your local community.

1. What services do you currently offer?

Indicate which services you provide then reiterate the key message that most opticians are well-located in the high street and are open at times that are convenient for patients, with virtually no waiting times.

If you are involved in any enhanced services such as a diabetic retinopathy screening programme or a glaucoma management scheme, these are good examples to talk about. If you provide a smoking cessation service this is another good example to demonstrate the range of services which can be provided in an optical practice.

2. How long have you been offering these services?

Indicate how long you have been offering these services then reiterate the key message that most practices are well-located in the high street/ shopping centre/ supermarket and are open at times that are convenient for patients.

3. Do other opticians locally offer these services?

Indicate whether other local practices offer these services. You can also mention other services such as the domiciliary eye care service and glaucoma management services, if you don't provide these services. You can also mention the role of the Local Optical Committee in bringing together local opticians.

4. What's the difference between an optometrist and a dispensing optician?

Explain the roles of the optometrist and the dispensing optician.

5. What experience do you have in delivering these services?

Optometrists undertake three years training at degree level, followed by one year supervised work in practice. In addition to that, we attend regular courses to ensure that our professional skills remain up-to-date.

We are ideally placed to help NHS patients with their eye healthcare – and given that half of all sight loss in the UK is avoidable, we are keen to play a greater role in the NHS. We are also able to offer advice on health living such as smoking cessation.

6. Who is paying for these clinical services? Are they free?

Outline who is entitled to the NHS sight test and what other eye care services are available on the NHS, i.e. diabetic retinopathy screening for people with diabetes. Explain that the NHS Sight Test fee is negotiated and funded centrally (i.e. at a national level with the Department of Health) and that other services such as diabetic retinopathy screening, glaucoma management schemes etc are negotiated and funded locally by the PCT.

With an ageing population there will inevitably be a growing demand for eye care services. With already overstretched hospital eye clinics and GPs, we are keen that greater use is made of our expertise to take the pressure off hospitals and GPs.

7. Why is your local MP here today?

Our local MP recognises the importance of good eye health care and is interested in learning first-hand about the current provision in his/ her constituency. We are delighted to be able to show him/ her, the range of services which we currently provide here.

8. Why is there a GP here today?

If you have a good relationship with local GPs it is useful to invite them along to the event as well. If they have been involved in a local referral scheme this is a good example to mention.

A sight test can pick up a number of potential health problems such as high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol and the optometrist would then refer the patient to the GP for further tests. It's important that GPs and other healthcare professionals have an understanding of the importance of

eye health and the range of services available in an optical practice, so they can inform their patients of need for regular sight tests and refer appropriately to other eye care services.

10. Template Invitation to Local MP

[to be sent by optom]

[Address of practice]

House of Commons,
London,
SW1A 0AA

[Date]

Dear Mr./ Mrs./ Ms./ Dr. *[NAME]*,

I would like to invite you to an open session at your local optical practice to see for yourself the eye health care available in your constituency. This event is one of a number organised by my Local Optical Committee at a range of practices across *[INSERT TOWN/ CITY]* involving independent practices as well as some of the more well known brands.

I will be inviting patients to the event so this is an ideal opportunity for you to meet your constituents and listen to their concerns about their eye health care and treatment. I have also been speaking to the local media who are very keen to cover the event and report on the work that is being done in *[INSERT TOWN/CITY]*.

I will further be inviting representatives from the Primary Care Trust, eye care charities, as well as a local GP to talk about the impact eye care services have had on the medical profession in the region. I hope this will be the start of a constructive debate about eye health and how to improve NHS care.

The event will take place at *[INSERT NAME AND ADDRESS OF PRACTICE]* and I would initially propose the following dates:

[SUGGEST DATES ON FRIDAY OR SATURDAY AFTERNOONS, OR MONDAY MORNINGS – SEE GUIDE]

Please let me know which of these dates is most suitable for you to come and visit us; alternatively, please could you suggest another date when it would be more convenient for you?

Two million people in the UK are currently at risk of losing their sight. Your support can help change that.

I look forward to receiving your reply.

Yours sincerely,

[NAME OF OPTICIAN HOSTING OPEN SESSION]

[ADD YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS]

11. Template Invitation to PCTs/ GPs/ Local Organisations

[Address of practice]

[Address of who you are writing to]

[Date]

Dear Mr./ Mrs./ Ms./ Dr. *[NAME]*,

We would like to invite you to an open session at your local opticians/optometrists to see for yourself the eye healthcare available in your area.

The event will take place on *[INSERT DATE OF OPEN SESSION]* at *[INSERT NAME AND ADDRESS OF PRACTICE]* and *[INSERT NAME OF MP]* will be at the practice from *[INSERT TIME]*.

In addition to *[INSERT NAME OF MP]* attending the event, a number of patients who have benefited from the services available have been invited to talk about their experiences, as well as some local GPs and eye health organisations *[DELETE AS APPROPRIATE]*. We hope this will be the start of constructive debate about eye health and how to improve NHS care.

We have also been speaking to the local media who are very keen to cover the event and report on the work that is being done in *[INSERT NAME OF REGION/ CITY]*.

If you would like to attend, we would ask that you arrive by *[INSERT TIME – SEE TIMETABLE IN GUIDANCE NOTES]* to give you time to meet our other guests ahead of *[INSERT NAME OF MP]*'s arrival. The session should finish by *[INSERT TIME – SEE TIMETABLE IN GUIDANCE NOTES]*.

Two million people in the UK are currently at risk of losing their sight. Your support can help change that.

We look forward to receiving your reply.

Yours sincerely,

[NAME OF OPTICIAN HOSTING OPEN SESSION]

[ADD YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS]

12. Template Invitation to Patients

[to be sent by optom]

[Address of practice]

[Address of who you are writing to]

[Date]

Dear Mr./ Mrs./ Ms./ Dr. *[NAME]*,

I am holding an open session at my practice to show our local MP our work in looking after the community's eye health. I would very much like you to attend and talk about your experiences.

The event will take place on *[INSERT DATE OF OPEN SESSION]* at *[INSERT NAME AND ADDRESS OF PRACTICE]* and in addition to *[INSERT NAME OF MP]*, Primary Care Trust representatives, GPs and other organisations working in the field will also be attending. I hope that this will be the start of a constructive debate about eye health and how to improve NHS care – your comments and views are therefore vital to making this a success.

I have also been speaking to the local media who are very keen to cover the event and report on the work that is being done in *[INSERT NAME OF REGION/ CITY]*. As a result there might also be a couple of journalists present, who may want to talk to you about your experiences.

If you would like to attend, please could you arrive by *[INSERT TIME – SEE TIMETABLE IN GUIDANCE NOTES]* to give you time to meet the other guests ahead of *[INSERT NAME OF MP]*'s arrival. The session should finish by *[INSERT TIME – SEE TIMETABLE IN GUIDANCE NOTES]*.

If you have any questions about any of this, please do give me a call.

I look forward to receiving your reply

Yours sincerely,

[NAME OF OPTICIAN HOSTING OPEN SESSION]

[ADD YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS]

13. Calling Notice/ Media Invitation Template

[insert city/ region] MPs TO VISIT LOCAL OPTICIANS/ OPTOMETRIST, MEET PATIENTS AND LEARN ABOUT NEW SERVICES IN [insert city/ region] AREA

[DATE YOU ARE SENDING THIS CALLING NOTICE] - [INSERT NAMES OF VISITING MPs] will be visiting a [INSERT CITY/ REGION] opticians to learn about the new eye healthcare services that are currently available.

The MPs will meet with local patients and hear their experiences of how they have benefited from opticians services, such as [GIVE EXAMPLES OF SERVICES OFFERED BY THE OPTICIANS HOLDING OPEN SESSIONS IN YOUR AREA].

Recent Government proposals have called for primary healthcare services to be delivered in a community setting wherever possible. This MP visit is an opportunity to help [insert city/ region] residents understand the healthcare services available to them at their local opticians – to be accessed at their convenience in their local high street.

Who: [INSERT NAMES OF MPs WHO WILL BE ATTENDING, E.G.

Rt Hon Phil Woolas MP for Oldham East and Minister of State responsible for Home Office and HM Treasury;

Tony Lloyd MP, Labour Party Chair.]

[insert city/ region] opticians;
[insert city/ region] patients;
[insert city/ region] PCT executives;
[insert city/ region] GPs; and

other local [insert city/ region] eye health organisations e.g. Birmingham Action for Blind People, RNIB

What: [insert city/ region] opticians will be holding an open session to show the important role they play in providing eye healthcare services to their local community. Patients will be available to talk about their own personal experiences of receiving eye healthcare services from their local opticians and how this has been to their benefit.

When: [DATE 2009]

Where: [ADDRESS OF PRACTICE]

For more information and **to confirm your attendance**, please contact [INSERT NAME AND CONTACT DETAILS OF LOC COORDINATOR].

~ENDS~

14. Press Pack Template

[to be written by optom]

Practice Name:

Background: *[How long has the practice has been at this site?
How long has the staff have been working at the practice?
plus any other useful information e.g. awards received]*

Opening Hours:

Manager:

Telephone:

Email:

Address:

Website:

Overview of services available at this practice

- Xxx
- Xxx
- Xxx

Healthcare professionals attending open session

- MP
- PCT commissioners
- PCT Local Optometric Advisor
- Local eye health organisations e.g. Birmingham Action for Blind People, RNIB
- GPs

Case studies

Mr. A from xyz...

Mrs. B from zyx...

*If you have any further questions following the open session,
please do not hesitate to get in touch.*

15. MP Biography Template

[to be produced by optom/ LOC]

These are the sorts of questions which you should look to answer in your research:

- **Which constituency and party does this MP represent? What is this MP's majority i.e. does this MP hold a safe seat?**
If the MP's seat is not safe then this makes it an even better opportunity for you, as a constituent, to make your views known.
- **Do they hold any positions within the party e.g. Secretary of State, Minister of State, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Parliamentary Private Secretary? How long has the MP held these positions?**
An MP who holds a specific position will have more influence within their party, even if their own area of interest is not health.
- **Overview of parliamentary career – has this MP shown an interest in healthcare in the past? Is this MP a member of any Select Committees or All Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs) of relevance?**
If MP is a member of the Health Select Committee or a health-related APPG, it shows that they have a clear interest in health and are likely to be more receptive to the idea of visiting their local optometrist.
- **Has this MP recently asked any questions in Parliament on health and in particular eye health? (You can find this information on www.theyworkforyou.com).**
Again, if an MP has asked questions in Parliament on health related topics, it indicates that they will have an interest in meeting with their local optometrist.
- **Overview of non-parliamentary career – has this MP done anything outside of politics which is of particular relevance to eye healthcare?**
MP who have worked in the health sector, or even better, the optical sector, should have a basic knowledge of the issues at hand.
- **Anything else of interest e.g. other half, children, hobbies**
This is useful for small talk and establishing a rapport during the initial minutes of the visit.

Example biography:



Nick Harvey MP: Background

- Nick is a Lib Dem MP and has represented North Devon with a majority of 4,972 since the 1992 General Election.
- He is currently the Liberal Democrat Shadow Secretary of State for Defence, a post which he has held since 2006. He is also currently a member of the Select Committee for Standards and Privileges.
- Nick has held various roles throughout his Commons Career, including two years as Principal Spokesperson for Health during 1999-2001.
- He is active in asking questions in Parliament and in the latter half of 2008 tabled a number of questions on eye healthcare provision for the armed forces.
- Outside of Parliament, Nick's non-political career has been in communications. Since leaving consultancy Dewe Rogerson (now Citigate Dewe Rogerson) in 1991, he has been working as a freelance consultant.
- Married with two children, Nick has been the Vice-chair of the All-Party Beer Group since 2005 and his other hobbies include travel and football.

16. MP Thank You Letter Template

[to be sent jointly by optom and LOC chair]

[Address of practice]

[Address of who you are writing to]

[Date]

Dear Mr./ Mrs./ Ms./ Dr. *[NAME]*,

Many thanks for visiting *[NAME OF PRACTICE]* on *[INSERT DATE]*. We are sure you will agree that it was a very productive session for all concerned, and our patients particularly appreciated having the opportunity to meet you and let you know of their concerns.

From our perspective, it was also useful to be able to show you our work as optometrists, and to make you aware of why the general public need to look after their eye health and go for regular sight tests. As we explained on the day, opticians' practices are very conveniently located and so can be easily accessed by the community – optometrists are therefore ideally placed to provide NHS patients with routine services beyond sight testing. Furthermore, as a professional community, we are willing and able to play an enhanced role in an NHS fit for the needs of the twenty-first century.

Attached to this letter are a couple of photos which we took on the day; you may like to post these on your website. **[REMEMBER TO ATTACH THE PHOTOS]**. The event was also covered in the local press – we have also attached some of the coverage we received in **[INSERT NAMES OF PAPERS – REMEMBER TO ATTACH THE ARTICLES]**

Our colleague Heather Marshall at the Association of Optometrists (AOP) may be in contact with your office to follow up with further information. We hope this will be useful for you.

Thank you once again for your time. If you have any further questions, or if we can assist you in any way, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

We hope this will be the beginning of a constructive and fruitful debate on eye healthcare.

Yours sincerely,

[NAME OF OPTICIAN HOSTING OPEN SESSION + NAME OF LOC CHAIR]

[ADD YOUR EMAIL ADDRESSES]

17. Template Press Release

EYE HEALTH ON THE POLITICAL AGENDA: LOCAL MP TO RAISE AWARENESS OF EYE HEALTHCARE SERVICES IN [INSERT CITY/ REGION]

[DATE YOU ARE SENDING THIS PRESS RELEASE] – On [DATE OF VISIT], [NAME OF HOSTING PRACTICE] hosted [NAME OF MP] MP in [INSERT LOCATION].

Also attending were representatives from [LIST PCT REPRESENTATIVES AND OTHER INVITED GUESTS].

At the event [NAME OF MP] met with patients who had benefited receiving eye healthcare from their local opticians and learnt about the range of services available from the branch, including [LIST SERVICES ON OFFER AT PRACTICE].

During the visit the patients took the time to tell the MP how they had specifically benefited from receiving eye healthcare services in a community setting. They highlighted the accessibility and convenience of being able to attend routine check ups on their local high street. They also talked at length about how much they value the role their optician plays in helping them to manage their eye health and wellness.

[NAME OF PATIENT, AGE] a local patient, said:

“[DRAFT A QUOTE AS IF YOUR PATIENT WERE TALKING ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES. CHECK THAT THEY ARE HAPPY WITH WHAT YOU HAVE WRITTEN.]”

[You will need to check with the MP office that they are happy with the quote which is being attributed to them below – you should not include the statement unless you get it signed off by the MP or their office]:

Following [his/ her] visit, [INSERT NAME OF MP] said:

“Community optician/optometrist practices across [INSERT NAME OF LOCATION] are providing valuable support, helping patients to manage their eye healthcare in a community setting. Lots of people don't know about all of the services available to them and I hope my visit has highlighted the extent and quality on offer.”

Or

“With two million people in the UK at risk of losing their sight, we need to take every step to improve eye healthcare – in particular in light of the fact that half of this sight loss is preventable. Routine check-ups at your local optician/

optometrists should be a regular feature on everybody's list for health and wellness management."

Commenting on the visit, [NAME OF HOSTING OPTOMETRIST] said:

"Local community opticians are ideally placed to provide NHS patients with routine check-ups and can help patients to manage their eye health in a community setting.

"Following the recent contract negotiations, community opticians look forward to playing a greater role in eye healthcare, helping their patients to successfully manage their eye health."

~Ends~

For images of the visit, interviews with the patients, optician or MPs, please contact [INSERT NAME OF LOC REPRESENTATIVE or PRACTICE MANAGER] on [INSERT CONTACT DETAILS].

[ADD A SHORT BACKGROUND PIECE ON THE PRACTICE AND OPTICIAN/ OPTOMETRIST]

18. Example Press Release

6 April 2009 – On Friday 3rd April, Julie Sznepka Optometrist hosted Mark Hunter MP in Gatley, Cheadle.

Also attending were representatives from Stockport Primary Care Trust, Stockport Low Vision Committee, RNIB, Guide Dogs for the Blind and the Macular Disease Society.

At the event Mark Hunter met with patients who had benefited receiving eye healthcare from their local opticians and learnt about the range of services available from the branch, including eye examinations, diabetic eye screening, cataract assessments and DVLA vision tests.

During the visit the patients took the time to tell the MPs how they had specifically benefited from receiving eye healthcare services in a community setting. They highlighted the accessibility and convenience of being able to attend routine check ups on their local high street. They also talked at length about how much they value the role their optician plays in helping them to manage their eye health and wellness.

Derek Wright, 67, a local patient, said:

“I have diabetes and during a routine eye examination, I was diagnosed with Diabetic Retinopathy, which could have led to me losing my sight. Following the diagnosis, Julie referred me to a treatment programme which was successful and I can’t thank her enough for spotting it in time. I never knew that I was at risk and it was the last thing I expected from an eye test!”

Following his visit, Mark Hunter MP said:

“With two million people in the UK at risk of losing their sight, we need to take every step to improve eye healthcare – in particular in light of the fact that half of this sight loss is preventable. Routine check-ups at your local optician should be a regular feature on everybody’s list for health and wellness management.”

Commenting on the visit, Julie Sznepka said:

“Local community opticians are ideally placed to provide NHS patients with routine check-ups and can help patients to manage their eye health in a community setting.

“Following the recent contract negotiations, community opticians look forward to playing a greater role in eye healthcare, helping their patients to successfully manage their eye health.”

~Ends~

For images of the visit, interviews with the patients, optician or MP, please contact Eleanor de Kanter on 0207 618 9164.

Notes to Editor

1. Julie Sznepka Optometrist is located at 179 Gatley Rd, Gatley, Cheshire, SK8 4BB. The practice has been based at its current site for over 30 years. Julie Sznepka has owned the practice 5.5 years. For further information go to <http://jsznepkaoptom.co.uk/home.htm>
2. RNIB (Royal National Institute of Blind People) is a UK charity which provides support for blind or partially sighted people and also actively campaigns to eliminate avoidable sight loss.
3. Guide Dogs for the Blind provide guide dogs and other mobility services that increase the independence and dignity of blind and partially-sighted people.
4. The Macular Disease Society is the only UK charity dedicated to helping people with macular degeneration and aims to build confidence and independence for those with central vision impairment.