

## Optometry Northern Ireland Chairperson's report 2017

Thank you all for coming here this evening to the ONI Annual General Meeting.

This is my first report as Chair of Optometry Northern Ireland. This time last year we voted in a new council for Optometry Northern Ireland and with this came the opportunity to examine our role and to give consideration to the future. Early meetings of the new council resulted in the formation of four sub-committees, namely:

- Strategy and Policy
- Education and Professional Development
- Financial and Legal
- Marketing and Communications

Individual council members were allocated on the various sub-committees as shown and so far much has been achieved.

- The Strategy and Policy sub-committee started with a Strategic Planning Day where they, alongside representatives from the relevant professional bodies examined various issues. These included the ONI constitution, a two year business plan, negotiation and communication. From this very productive day work has begun on a new constitution and a business plan. The sub-committee have been exploring how best to negotiate and who best to negotiate with. Clearly ONI's communication with the profession in Northern Ireland has been lacking so since early 2017 we have begun updating practitioners on who we are and what we do following our monthly council meetings.
- The Financial and Legal sub-committee have been working alongside colleagues from the NIOS to source the best place to invest our money and Moyra will talk to you about this later within the Treasurer's report. This sub-committee have also started looking at the Levy, specifically looking at non-payers. Having sought advice from other UK regions and from attendees at the Strategic Planning Day it was decided that the best course of action would be to approach non-payers and to try and get them on board. From this, all members of the council have been allocated various practices to target and are in the process of contacting these

non-payers to inform them of the Levy and the advantages of being within the system.

- Following the success of the 2015 advertising campaign, the Marketing and Communications sub-committee started work on a campaign for February 2017. This was launched around Valentine's day with the tag line 'See well to look well' and hopefully you saw the campaign on a billboard or a bus in your region. During the run the media company involved were able to secure an article slot with BBC Newline. However, we were unable to track down a good news story with a patient willing to speak on camera. Following on from this, we would ask you to please try and keep note of any of these type of media-friendly stories which describe the success of patient care within primary care optometry. We were, however, able to measure the success of the campaign and I would like to take this opportunity to thank those of you who returned patient throughput data to ONI. Your figures demonstrated a very small increase in both GOS and private examinations from the week during the campaign to the week after the campaign. We plan to explore this further by looking at total GOS throughput during the period.

Alongside all of this ONI have been reaching out to others with whom we feel we should be communicating. So we have had Martin Holley from the Ophthalmic committee and Professor Nathan Congdon, an ophthalmologist working as a research post at Queen's University at two of our recent council meetings. We continue to engage with the NIOS formally on annual basis and informally when necessary. We also continue to meet regularly with the Raymond Curran and his team at the HSCB. Our annual five nations meeting is always an interesting event and is a fantastic opportunity to learn from what's happening in other regions.

Over and above all of this, I as Chair of ONI have met with representatives from various professional bodies and attend various events on behalf of ONI and the ONI have provided input into various consultations throughout the year.

So this is what has been happening at council level. I want to now look at what has been happening within primary care optometry.

- The Southern Primary Eyecare Assessment and Referral Service (SPEARS), which I'm sure you are all aware of, had

been initially piloted in the Armagh/Dungannon area and we are delighted that this has been extended throughout the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area until March 2018. The next step we would like to see is a funded service throughout the whole of Northern Ireland.

- Local enhanced service LES 1 (Intraocular repeat measures) continues with 370 plus providers
- Local enhanced service LES 2 (enhanced case finding) has now been launched with over 100 practitioners now trained to deliver the service with the majority part funded by the HSCB. At this point in time a lot of the practitioners currently eligible to deliver LES 2 are unsure regarding protocols so we have asked Margaret McMullan from the HSCB to clear up any queries we might have this evening. And we will hear from Margaret later.
- Two thirds of practitioners are now enabled within the Clinical Communications Gateway (CCG) which allows practitioners to refer patients electronically. There appears to be a mixed response from local optometrists regarding the system, however I believe that the benefits will outweigh any initial teething problems. Again if you have any questions about electronic referral you will have the opportunity to ask Raymond Curran from the HSCB later.

By now, I would hope that optometrists in Northern Ireland are familiar with Developing Eye Care Partnerships (DEP). This five year project was set up with a view to improve commissioning and provision of eye care services in Northern Ireland and is due to come to an end in October 2017. One of the main aims of the project was to “contribute to the independence of adults and maintaining them well in the community, for as long as possible, by improving access to current Health and Social Care (HSC) treatment for acute and/or long-term eye conditions” and clearly with DEP coming to an end the legacy of this project is of interest to ONI as it can be the vehicle by which primary care optometrists are better utilised in Northern Ireland. With this in mind, we were interested to hear that an independent body – the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) had been asked to carry out a review of DEP in early 2017. RQIA reviews aim to provide assurance to the public about the quality, safety and availability of health and social care services in Northern Ireland and their reviews also aim to encourage continuous improvements in health and social care services and ensure the rights of service users are

safeguarded. Some of you may be aware of this review as several practitioners were interviewed by RQIA personnel and also invited to take part in focus groups with the review panel. The RQIA Review Panel comprised of health care professionals mainly based in other UK regions and with previous working knowledge of enhanced eye care services. Several ONI council members including myself took part in the review and we were encouraged by the review panel's endorsement of ONI's work and their general support for primary care optometry in Northern Ireland. The report from the review is due to be published in September 2017 and we hope that this will provide us with leverage to move forward.

Moving forward, we hope to continue the good work that has been started this year – this report is just a snapshot of the work that goes on throughout the year. Please contact us through our website with any feedback or issues you would like us to raise at council. I would like to take this opportunity to say thanks to the NIOS for their continued support and thanks to, you, the practitioner, for engaging in the new initiatives – it is yourselves that makes a scheme such as SPEARS successful.

Finally, I would like to thank the council members and Sara for their hard work over the past twelve months. I really feel we have achieved a lot and that there is much more yet to come!