

Buckinghamshire Priorities Committee

Policy Statement: Cataract removal in adults – threshold for referral for surgery

Date of Issue: August 2009

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 elderly 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 (260,000 per year) at a cost in excess of £200M, with an estimated cost-utility of £1150/QALY 9(2006 data).

In setting out criteria for eligibility for referral below, Buckinghamshire PCT recognises that measurements of visual acuity do not always reflect accurately the degree of visual disability patients may experience as a result of cataracts.

Patients with a visual acuity of 6/9 or better in either eye are considered a LOW PRIORITY for cataract surgery.

- Cataract will be commissioned only for patients who, after correction (e.g. with glasses), have a visual acuity of less than 6/9 or worse in their cataract affected eyes
- Referral of patients with cataracts to ophthalmologists should therefore be based upon three following indications;
 1. Reduced visual acuity
 - o Documented to be 6/9 or worse in the affected eye (corrected)
 2. AND impairment of lifestyle such as;
 - o The patient is at significant risk of falls
 - o OR the patient's vision is affecting their ability to drive
 - o OR the patient's vision is substantially affecting their ability to work
 - o OR the patient's vision is substantially affecting their ability to undertake leisure activities such as reading, watching television or recognising faces
 3. AND willingness to have cataract surgery ;
 - o The referring optometrist or GP has discussed the risks and benefits using an approved information leaflet (nationally or locally agreed) and ensured the patient understand and is willing to undergo surgery before referring.
 - o Exceptional cases that do not meet the above criteria can be considered at

NOTES:

1. *Exceptional circumstances may be considered where there is evidence of significant health impairment and there is also evidence of the intervention improving health status.*

2. *This policy will be reviewed in light of new evidence or guidance from NICE.*

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the PCT individual case panel, e.g. though with significant functional disability from cataract but no visual acuity loss.

Follow – up Care pathways would suggest only a minority of patients will require a second postoperative visit to the hospital following surgery. These patients include those

- At increased risk of complications from surgery, for example those with a history of glaucoma
- Who experienced complications of surgery
- Whose post-operative recovery is of concern to their optometrist

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