



Offthalmoleg Ardal
De-ddwyrain Cymru
South East Wales
Regional Ophthalmology

Planning Future Cataracts Services in South East Wales

Frequently Asked Questions

What are Cataracts?

Cataracts are when the lens (a small transparent disc) inside your eye develops cloudy patches.

Over time these patches usually become bigger, causing blurry, misty vision and eventually blindness.

When we're young, our lenses are usually like clear glass, allowing us to see through them. As we get older, they start to become frosted, like bathroom glass, and begin to limit our vision.

Cataracts usually appear in both eyes. They may not necessarily develop at the same time or be the same in each eye.

They're more common in older adults and can affect your ability to carry out daily activities such as driving.

How do you test for Cataracts?

An optician will do a series of eye tests, including what is known as a visual acuity exam, which measures how well you see at various distances.

If the optician thinks you have cataracts, you may be referred to an eye specialist (ophthalmologist) for more tests and treatment.

How are Cataracts treated?

If your cataracts are fairly mild, stronger glasses and brighter reading lights may help for a while.

Cataracts get worse over time however, so you'll eventually need surgery to remove and replace the affected lens.

Surgery is the only treatment that's proven to be effective for cataracts.

What is a Cataract Surgery Assessment

If you have cataracts, your optician will refer you to an eye specialist (ophthalmologist) who will do additional tests and take measurements of your eye.

They will collect information about your health and your fitness for surgery, and do other measurements such as blood pressure and blood sugar. They will talk to you about the surgery itself and make sure this is the right option for you.

What is involved in Cataract Surgery?

Cataract surgery is a straightforward procedure that usually takes less than 30 minutes.

During the operation, the surgeon will make a tiny cut in your eye to remove the cloudy lens and replace it with a new lens.

It's carried out as day surgery and you should be able to go home on the same day.

Most people will need to wear glasses for some tasks, like reading, after surgery regardless of the type of lens they have fitted

How Common are Cataracts?

About 1 in 3 people in the UK over the age of 65 have at least one cataract. Men and women are equally affected. Often both eyes are affected but one eye is typically worse than the other.

Most age-related cataracts take many years to form, and at first there will be no symptoms. Many people with an early cataract do not realise they have it as there is very little cloudiness. For most, therefore, the cataract will be diagnosed at a routine eye check before symptoms ever develop.

The total population across Aneurin Bevan, Cardiff and Vale and Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Boards is approximately 1.5million. Of those, approximately 665,000 are over 65.

How do current cataract services work?

Patients referred for cataract services are seen at their local hospital where the service is provided. Services are provided in local hospitals (Royal Gwent Hospital, Nevill Hall Hospital, University Hospital of Wales in Cardiff, Royal Glamorgan Hospital, Princes of Wales Hospital). Some patients need to travel to hospital twice for the assessment to be completed and patients have long waiting times.

Why do cataract services need to be changed?

Services need to be changed to reduce waiting times for patients and provide cataracts services before sight is severely affected. There is good evidence that bringing services together will make them more efficient and reduce waiting times for patients - the different future options for the service have been developed to achieve this.

What are the potential benefits of a new model of service?

The benefits of a new service model are that patients will spend less time waiting for cataracts services and have treatment before their cataracts progress to the point where sight is severely impaired.

Patients will receive services in a more streamlined way and only have to visit a hospital site twice, once for the assessment and a second time for surgery.

The new service model would be more efficient and so a greater number of patients can be seen and more patients can receive cataracts services.

How many patients will these changes affect?

There are approximately 18,000 patients on the waiting list and a demand of 10,000 additional patients per year. All of these patients will be affected by the changes proposed.

Will I have to travel further for treatment?

Travel may be further for some patients in the area, dependent on the options selected for future service provision. A maximum travel distance would be around 30 miles one way, although the majority of patients will have shorter journeys. Feedback from the public engagement will be important to determine how we best balance potentially longer traveling times with the additional service benefits and shorter waiting times for treatment.

What if I can't travel further?

Whichever option is chosen for the future, services will still be available at local hospitals (Royal Gwent Hospital, Nevill Hall Hospital, University Hospital of Wales in Cardiff, Royal Glamorgan Hospital, Princess of Wales Hospital) and patients can be treated at their local hospital if they are unable to travel further.

Do the doctors support change?

Yes, medical staff in ophthalmology are supportive of changes to the service. Doctors want to provide this sight restoring service to as many

patients as possible and welcome the opportunity to reduce waiting times and deliver services more efficiently.