

<b>Meeting title:</b>	Public Trust Board	<b>Public Trust Board paper V</b>			
<b>Date of the meeting:</b>	12 <sup>th</sup> October 2023				
<b>Title:</b>	Orthoptics Service Video				
<b>Report presented by:</b>	Julie Hogg and Michelle Smith				
<b>Report written by:</b>	Clare Pheasant, Chief Allied Health Professional				
<b>Action – this paper is for:</b>	Decision/Approval		Assurance		Update X

## 1. Overview

This is the first in a series of new videos shining a light on UHL services and the care they are providing to patients. As well as providing an insight to Board, the videos will be used in our communications channels, including the website, to give patients a sense of what they can expect from our services, and to support in education and recruitment.

## 2. Orthoptists as a profession

Orthoptists are one of the fourteen allied health professions regulated by the Health Care Professions Council. Orthoptists treat patients of all ages with defects of binocular vision (how the eyes work together) and abnormalities of eye movement. Most of the work with babies and children involves the investigation and management of strabismus (misalignment of the eyes/squint) and amblyopia (lazy eye). This profession also leads childhood vision screening within the community, identifying early visual impairment or pathology. There are also orthoptists who specialise in the diagnosis and management of adults who have experienced a neurological episode causing an eye muscle/nerve weakness resulting in double vision, e.g. following a stroke.

There are only 1,534 Orthoptists on the Health Care Professions Council register (March 2023), but whilst small in numbers they are a highly specialised professional group. The undergraduate program for orthoptists is only provided by three higher education institutes in the UK and so pipeline is also small.

## 3. The Orthoptics Service at UHL

The service comprises 18 staff; one orthoptist support worker, and 17 registered orthoptists. The team work alongside 4 paediatric consultant ophthalmologists and a team of optometrists across a range of specialities. The main clinics are held in Leicester Royal Infirmary in the recently refurbished out-patient clinic, and they also provide services in community hospitals and medical practices across Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland.

The department receives referrals from a variety of specialties across the Trust including maxillofacial, paediatrics, endocrinology, and stroke medicine. They provide a combined care service for paediatric patients. These are independently run clinics by the orthoptists and optometrists who work closely together to manage new patients with a squint, lazy vision, and a significant glasses prescription.

The department has worked hard to be innovative in service delivery and is highly regarded regionally. This has resulted in a strong record of recruitment and retention of staff. The paediatric cataract clinic, established 15 years ago, is one of a few clinics across the Midlands providing a specialised service for children with cataracts. Children born with or who develop cataracts at an early age are at high risk of significant sight impairment. The provision of a dedicated service for these children ensures the best possible visual outcomes supporting patients and parents throughout their intensive treatment.

Most recently a specialised educational needs / cerebral visual impairment clinic has been implemented. This clinic is offered with the aim to make eye assessments more accessible to patients who have additional needs. Cerebral visual impairment is frequently linked to many special educational needs' conditions such as autism and Down Syndrome. Patients have an extended appointment time and see the same clinician at every visit. This new clinic has reduced anxiety in the children attending the clinic and offers support to parents by the development of relationships with an orthoptist that a child may see for the duration of their care.

#### **4. Future service developments and opportunities**

Future developments include scoping additional extended roles to ensure the clinical skills of orthoptists are utilised to their full extent. The development of training programs enabling orthoptists to support squint surgery is currently being scoped, working within the boundaries of regulatory and professional body recommendations.

An additional consideration is that recent reports by the British and Irish Orthoptist Society suggests that Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland is one of only two integrated care systems in England not to run an early years school screening program whereby visual defects and serious pathology can be identified early in school life supporting children with accessing the right care early and reducing developmental delays associated with poor vision. As a department, we will work with colleagues to identify how this may be addressed in the future.

Finally, the department has a great reputation as an educational placement site, taking students from both Sheffield and Liverpool universities. The team actively supports the training of medical students, pre-registration optometrists and post-graduate doctors recently being nominated and shortlisted for the Trusts medical educator's award.