

Ophthalmology

The children's eye service

Introduction

This booklet has been written to give parents and carers of children who attend the Eye Clinic some information about the different Health Care workers they are likely to meet and their roles within the department. It also explains the educational and social support available for children with a visual impairment and provides local contact numbers.

Hospital services

Visiting the orthoptist

The orthoptist is a health care professional who specialises in assessing and treating visual conditions in adults and children.

It is likely that when you visit the Eye Clinic, your child's vision will be assessed by an orthoptist prior to the doctor's consultation. He/she may also test the alignment of your child's eyes to find out if they have binocular vision (when both eyes coordinate with each other) or to prove the presence of a squint (turn, glide, and lazy eye). This gives an insight into the long-term visual capabilities of the child.

As babies and pre school children are not able to simply read down the letter chart as adults do, the orthoptist is trained in a variety of ways to assess how the children see. The tests are usually played as games and are completely non-invasive; the orthoptist will try their hardest to make the hospital visit as fun and as non-threatening as possible.

If one or both of your child's eyes are impaired, the orthoptist will be the primary person to provide support for wearing glasses. If needed, they may recommend patching therapy; which is aimed at covering the good eye in order to allow the vision in the weaker or lazy eye to improve. You will probably visit the orthoptist regularly to monitor your child's sight and to demonstrate improvement following glasses and/ or patching.

The orthoptist is also trained to administer dilating eye-drops (cyclopentolate) before the child visits the consultant. A local anaesthetic drop (proxymetacaine) may be given first, to prevent the drops from stinging. However, the orthoptist may decide against this if the child is particularly restless or frightened of the eye drops. It may be more appropriate in certain cases for the ophthalmic nurses to put the drops in, so that the child does not associate visits to the orthoptist with being frightened. The drops we use in clinic may not be effective in children with dark brown eyes and a different drop (atropine) may be given for you to instil at home before the next appointment if this is the case.

Badges and stickers are always on hand to give as rewards.

The ophthalmologist

The paediatric ophthalmologist is a qualified doctor who specialises in children's eye problems and surgery. The consultant in charge of this service at Addenbrooke's is Miss Allen. In addition, there are several other doctors who make up the medical team. The ophthalmologist will usually see your child once the initial assessment has been made by the orthoptist. He/she will test to see if your child is long or short sighted and will examine your child's eyes.

The doctor will discuss your child's eye problems with you and will explain the treatments available for your child's eye condition. If glasses are required, the doctor will give you a prescription and an NHS voucher to take to your high street optician for the glasses to be made up. Alternatively a dispensing optician is available on Mondays and Wednesdays (09:00 – 14:00) in Clinic 3 and on Thursdays (10:00 – 17:00) in Clinic 14.

The doctor will arrange for your child to have regular follow-up appointments with the orthoptists to check their visual progress with the glasses.

Very occasionally it is difficult to examine an infant or young child adequately and arrangements may be made for your child to be examined while he/ she is made drowsy by medication. This procedure is called 'examination under sedation'.

Sometimes special tests are required before the ophthalmologist can be sure about a visual problem. He/she may arrange electro-diagnostic testing in our Vision Science Department and arrange an x-ray or magnetic scan for your child. The ophthalmologist will arrange to see you and your child again to explain the results of these tests. An appointment may also be made for your child to see a paediatrician (children's doctor).

If the ophthalmologist recommends surgery for your child's eye condition, he/she will explain the procedure fully and give you a date for surgery.

Depending on the type of surgery needed, the age of your child and any underlying medical conditions; surgery may take place either as a 'day case' in the Cambridge Eye Unit, or with your child admitted as an 'inpatient' with the possibility of an overnight stay on a paediatric ward.

If your child has impaired vision, which cannot be corrected with glasses, the ophthalmologist will contact specialist teachers for the visually impaired in your area. They will support your child at home and later during his/her education. With your permission your child may be registered as having impaired sight, which may help you to claim additional social benefits for your child. The ophthalmologist may also arrange an appointment for your child to see a specialist optometrist who has experience in providing magnifying aids to help your child with their school work.

Often there is too much information to take in at one consultation. You may need time to think about the information given, before agreeing to treatment and think of other questions you want answered. If you want to discuss the diagnosis and treatment options with the ophthalmologist, please contact the department to arrange another appointment. You can also leave a message with Miss Allen's secretary and a doctor can contact you by phone.

Alternatively you could refer to the Paediatric Clinical Nurse Specialist for Ophthalmology as a point of contact and source of information.

The optometrist

The optometrist is an optician who is qualified to prescribe glasses. If your child wears glasses, regular checks will be needed until your child is old enough to visit a high street optometrist. The hospital optometrist will check the glasses are the correct strength after the orthoptists have assessed your child's vision. Up to two glasses prescriptions and NHS vouchers can be issued each year.

Vision science department

The Department of Vision Science carries out special tests, which may help the doctor to decide what is causing your child's eye problem. These tests give information about the retina at the back of the eye and about the optic nerve. The tests do not cause any discomfort, there are no injections and they are very simple to carry out.

Tests of young children and babies

Some young children and babies do not appear to see normally or they do not move their eyes normally. It may be important at an early stage to check that the retina at the back of the eye is normal. This can be done by a procedure specially developed for the very young.

- We will place small recording discs on the skin below each eye and on the forehead.

- These allow us to measure the response of the eye to brief flashes of light from a hand-held lamp.
- The test can be done quite quickly, we do not need to use eye drops and it does not cause discomfort.
- In other situations it may be important to try and estimate how much fine detail a child is able to see.
- We may need to do this when the child is too young to tell us what he/she can see, or is otherwise not able to co-operate fully.
- We will need to place three small recording discs on the skin, two on the forehead and one at the back of the head.
- The child will be positioned facing a computer screen and we measure the response of the eyes to patterns presented on the screen.
- The patterns become progressively smaller and we try to determine the smallest pattern that the eye responds to.

Low Vision Clinic

The Low Vision Clinic is a specialist clinic, which can benefit any child with vision that is less than “normal” but better than “perception of light.”

A low vision assessment will incorporate slightly different measures of vision than those carried out in a regular eye test. More emphasis is placed on the child’s ability to complete visual tasks easily and thus interact successfully and comfortably with their environment.

Ideally, children should be assessed **before** starting school, and the findings shared with the parents and teachers to ensure maximum benefit in school.

A Low Vision Practitioner, who will be a specially qualified optician or optometrist, carries out the clinics.

‘Low vision aids’ are a collection of types of devices, which help a person with low vision make the most of what they **can** see. This can include optical devices such as special spectacles, tinted lenses and magnifiers.

Electronic devices such as video magnifiers for close or distance vision, or computer hardware and software. Optical devices can only be supplied on a loan basis by the Low Vision Clinic; electronic devices can be sourced via the local education authority, through the statementing process.

Children do not need to be registered severely sight impaired or sight impaired to take advantage of the Low Vision Clinic. They only need to be referred by their consultant ophthalmologist.

Low vision liaison service

The Low Vision Liaison Co-ordinator is based in Clinic 3 at Addenbrooke's Hospital and is available to offer information, advice and support to children who have sight problems and their families. This person will also explain the registration process if required and give information on local and national support services.

Registering as severely sight impaired (blind) or sight impaired (partially sighted)

The consultant ophthalmologist may discuss registering your child as severely sight impaired or sight impaired.

This is a register, which is kept by the local authority in each area. Sensory Services holds the register to enable them to monitor the numbers of visually impaired people living in the area and provide the best possible service for people with sight problems.

The consultant ophthalmologist will decide whether your child is eligible to be registered by measuring the level of their vision. If the child meets the criteria the consultant can then certify them as either Severely Sight Impaired or Sight Impaired by completing a certification form (Certificate of Vision Impairment).

The form will then be sent to Sensory Services who will contact you and ask if you agree to your child being added to the register.

If your child is registered it may help you when claiming certain benefits and concessions. This can be discussed with the Low Vision Liaison Co-ordinator. It can also help in obtaining specialist information, advice and support in the community from the Visual Impairment Team, Education and Sensory Services.

Community services

Support from a specialist teacher for the visually impaired

Wherever you live you should find that your Children and Young People's Service employs a team of teachers specially trained in working with children who have significant visual impairments. This service may be called the Visual Impairment Service, the Visual Support Service or the Sensory Support Service.

Specialist teachers work with children from the earliest months of life until the time they leave school, whether or not the child has additional disabilities.

In fact, in many authorities there are specialist teachers additionally qualified in working with children who have multiple disabilities and visual impairment.

Referrals

Usually referrals to the teaching service come from health professionals. Most frequently, for the very young children and babies, your consultant paediatric ophthalmologist will ask you if you would like help at home and she/he will make the referral.

Once a referral is received a specialist teacher will ring or write to you to arrange a home visit. During this visit the teacher will assess the level of need and will agree with you a programme of support.

Role of the support teacher in the early years

All specialist teachers recognise the importance of early identification, assessment and intervention for pre-school children. They offer a number of services to assist you in ensuring the best start for your child. These include:

- Ongoing assessment and observation of your child's functional vision set within the context of overall development.
- Assistance in planning appropriate educational/ developmental strategies.
- Advice on how to stimulate your child's vision and motivation for movement.
- Help in understanding about your child's vision and how it might affect development and learning.
- Loan of, and advice on, appropriate toys, books, videos and equipment to help you and your child.
- Teaching of specific skills depending on your child's level of vision for example: developing good use of hands and to identify and discriminate between objects; listening skills, pre-mobility and environmental awareness, pre-braille, self-help skills etc.
- Information on support groups, voluntary agencies and local contacts including other parents of children with visual impairments.
- Help in ensuring your child has an appropriate pre-school placement and additional support if necessary.
- Specific training for staff in your child's pre-school, nursery or school.
- Mobility and orientation for your child.
- Contributing to the statutory assessment procedure if your child requires a Statement of Special Educational Needs.
- Working with other professionals to ensure a co-ordinated response to the needs of your child and your family. Other professionals may include paediatricians, physiotherapists, speech and language therapists, social workers, Portage Home Visiting Service and Health Visitors etc.

Sensory services

The diagnosis of visual impairment can be traumatic and overwhelming experience for all. However, parents do not need to feel that they have to cope alone.

Sensory services aim to work together with colleagues in health, education, welfare benefit departments, housing and voluntary organisations. This is to ensure that children with visual impairment and their parents receive maximum support, information and appropriate opportunity to enable each child to develop.

Sensory services maintain the register for children who are registered as sight impaired/partially sighted or severely sight impaired/blind and are therefore responsible for assessing the needs of such children. They provide information about registration, potential benefit entitlements, and significant other services. As such, the service ensures that children receive their full and rightful entitlement for assessment of need in accordance with the Children Act 1989.

Visually impaired children and Cam Sight

Cam Sight is the local charity offering support services to children and young people with a visual impairment and their parents or carers.

Cam Sights two rehabilitation workers run groups for children of all ages ranging from pre-school groups to social activities for teenagers.

There is also an equipment centre, with one to one support available for trying out a range of technologies.

If you would like further information please contact:

Paula Bird or Helen Shepherd-Wilson

Cam Sight

167 Green End Road

Cambridge

CB4 1RW

Telephone 01223 420033 Email: www.camsight.org.uk

Mobile 07535634233 Email: info@camsight.org.uk

Contacts

Hospital Contacts

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Consultant Paediatric Ophthalmologist,
Department of Ophthalmology,
Clinic 3, Box 41,
Cambridge University Hospitals NHS
Foundation Trust,
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Telephone: 01223 216577
(Office Hours: Tuesday to Friday, 09:30 until 17:00 hours)

Visual impairment teams (education)

Bedfordshire

Service for sensory impairment and
communication difficulties
The Child Development Centre
Hill Rise
Kempston
Bedford
MK42 7EB
Telephone: 01234 300710

Cambridgeshire

Children and young people's services
Visual impairment service
Amundsen House
Compass Point Business Park
Stocksbridge Way
St. Ives
Cambs
Telephone: 01480 375805

Hertfordshire

Low Incidence Team
The Woodside Centre
The Commons
Welwyn Garden City
AL7 4EN
Telephone: 01707 320697

Luton

Integrated Services for Children with
Additional Needs
Unity House
111 Stuart Street
Luton
LU1 5NP
Telephone: 01582 548107

Norfolk

Virtual School Support Services
Level 2
Vantage House
Fishers Lane
Norwich
NR7 9DF
Telephone: 01603 704040

Peterborough

Sensory Disability team
Nene Park Academy
Oudle Road
Peterborough
PE2 7EA
Telephone: 01733 36835

Suffolk

Sensory & Communication Service
Integrated Services for Children with Additional Needs
Endeavour House
Russell Road
Ipswich
Suffolk
IP1 2BX
Tel: 01473 264730

Useful contacts

Disability Information Services
Telephone: 01480 830833

RNIB Helpline 03031239999
RNIB website: www.rnib.org.uk
Parents Place: www.rnib.org.uk/parents

Contact a Family
Telephone: 08088083555
www.cafamily.org.uk

SPECS (specific eye conditions): www.eyeconditions.org.uk

LOOK (National Federation of Families with Visually Impaired Children)
Telephone 0121 458 5038
www.look-uk.org

Sense (for people with deaf blindness and associated disabilities)
Telephone: 020 7520 0972 or 08451270066
www.sense.org.uk

Scope
Telephone: 0808 800 3333
www.scope.org.uk



We are currently working towards a smoke free site. Smoking is only permitted in the designated smoking areas.

For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS stop smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169

Help with this leaflet:



If you would like this information in another language, large print or audio format, please ask the department to contact Patient Information: 01223 216032 or patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk



Document history

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