

General ophthalmic services (GOS) activity

2016/17 data quality issues

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Introduction

Purpose of document

General ophthalmic services (GOS) activity data are published and reported on by NHS Digital on a six monthly basis. The availability and quality of these data are known to be deficient for the reporting year 2016-17, and these issues are likely to continue into the foreseeable future.

This document details these issues, their causes, and their likely impacts in terms of the associated NHS Digital statistical releases. The aim is to inform users of these issues.

Scope

This document concerns the NHS Digital GOS activity publications (previously published versions of this release are available [on the NHS Digital website](#)), the data for which are sourced from the central ophthalmic payments system (COPS), which is part of the 'Exeter' system.

This document does not concern the NHS Digital general ophthalmic services workforce publications (these publications are available [on the NHS Digital website](#)).

Audience and dissemination of information

This document is intended to inform all users of these statistics; principally, NHS England and the Department of Health. Other key customers include the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB).

Where NHS Digital hold contact details for known users of the statistics, this document will be sent to those users directly. In addition, this document will be made available on the NHS Digital website at <http://content.digital.nhs.uk/dq>.

Background

NHS Digital access ophthalmic activity data twice yearly from the Central Ophthalmic Payments System, which is part of the 'Exeter' system. This is used to create a mid-year management information release, and an annual publication (released July each year) which has to date been a National Statistic.

The existing payment system is being shut down and a new provider is developing a new system which is not yet available.

Until the new system is available, the data NHS Digital are able to analyse and publish are limited in scope; the amount of data available in breakdowns is much reduced (table 1).

Table 1: availability of eligibility type for vouchers for spectacles/contact lenses, England, 2014/15 to 2016/17

Collection	Proportion of total number of vouchers where eligibility type is available
2016-17 mid year	21.07
2015-16 year end	72.34
2015-16 mid year	77.16
2014-15 year end	77.94
2014-15 mid year	77.16

There is a 'batch entry' system currently in place which provides overall totals of (1) Sight tests, (2) Vouchers and (3) Repairs and replacements: This provides NHS Digital with three separate figures for each Area Team¹.

Some breakdown figures appear to be available for some Area Teams. However, in light of the known changes the new provider has made to data processing, and the large-scale reduction in the availability of the data, NHS Digital are not able to ascertain the coverage or quality of these breakdowns.

Since the GOS activity data are no longer collected by local area teams (instead flowing directly to the new payment system provider), they are not able to provide NHS Digital with samples of data, or assessments of how representative the available data are.

Summary

NHS Digital can no longer produce the annual publication or the mid-year management information to the same standard or level of detail as previously published.

These statistics currently hold the status of 'National Statistics'. It is proposed that this 'badging' should be removed as they no longer meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value.

¹ The COPS aggregated data up to Area Team level (this remained the case once Area Teams were superseded); NHS Digital then present the data at this level, in addition to higher sub-national aggregations.

Resolution

NHS Digital do not anticipate an improvement in the availability of GOS activity data in the short or medium term. The availability of a full dataset is unlikely to be achieved until the new payments system is fully operational.

NHS England hold the contract with the new system provider, and are working with the new provider to ensure that the new system will make the required data available to NHS Digital. These requirements are gathered by way of stakeholder workshops, including input from NHS Digital, NHS England and the Department of Health.

A timeline for the implementation for the new payments system has not been provided.

The interim solution

In the absence of a fully operational payments system which is able to provide all fields required for the statistical publications, NHS Digital will access the limited dataset that is currently available in the Exeter system.

These data will be used to publish a smaller annual report. The exact content of this report will depend on the completeness of the data available in Exeter, to be ascertained by NHS Digital by comparing the data with those for previous years.

An estimate of the data available has been visualised using the published data for the 2015/16 reporting period. These contain highlighting to indicate those items which may or may not be included in the small report. These are available on request from primarycare.domain@nhs.net – please use ‘Ophthalmic Data Quality’ as the email title.

Actions for NHS Digital

- 1) Proposal to downgrade National Statistics status: **NHS Digital liaising with the UK Statistics Authority.**
- 2) Communicate all of above to customers: **NHS Digital to send this document directly to those customers for whom contact details are held, and to publish this document on the NHS Digital website at <http://content.digital.nhs.uk/dq>.**