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Somerset NHS Foundation Trust | New ophthalmology diagnostic centre opens in Taunton



Spotlight

New ophthalmology diagnostic centre opens in Taunton

11th May 2022 (last updated 11th May 2022)

People in Somerset with eye care needs are now able to get all their diagnostic tests in one place – at a new centre on the outskirts of Taunton run by Somerset NHS Foundation Trust.

The new ophthalmology diagnostic centre, at Harrison House, Blackbrook Business Park, near junction 25 of the M5, is expected to see around 10,000 retinal and glaucoma patients a year in one stop shop where the patient has a series of tests and images taken in the same appointment.

Ophthalmology is the highest volume outpatient specialty in the NHS and demand for the treatment of eye care areas, such as glaucoma, cataract, retina and urgent care, is predicted to rise by 60 per cent in medical retina and 44 per cent in glaucoma over the next 20 years.

Patients with retinal and glaucoma conditions need regular and timely life-long eye care to prevent permanent visual loss.

According to local NHS figures both conditions increase in prevalence with age and the growth rate for ophthalmology care in Somerset is estimated at 1.8 per cent every year – which is 50 per cent higher than the national average, reflecting the ageing population in Somerset.

The centre builds on the NHS' aim to develop a series of community diagnostic centres away from acute hospital sites, which was a key recommendation in an independent review of NHS diagnostics capacity by renowned cancer specialist, Professor Sir Mike Richards CBE, former National Cancer Director in the Department of Health.

Mr Edward Herbert, a consultant ophthalmic surgeon at Somerset NHS Foundation Trust, said: "This is a great step forward in delivering eye care across Somerset. We have been running imaging assessment clinics in the main hospital for a number of years and have found significant advantages.

"With clearer pathways of care, the clinics tend to run much more on time than a standard clinic and the length of time each patient needs to be in the unit is much shorter. Access to the clinic is also expected to be a good deal easier than the main hospital.

"Expanding these clinics off-site will help us catch up with the backlog from the pandemic and meet the future rising demand."

A second ophthalmology diagnostic centre is also set to open in Yeovil's Quedam Shopping Centre later in the summer run by Yeovil District Hospital.

The two centres are expected to tackle a growing waiting list and will reduce the delays patients have experienced over the last two years as a result of the pandemic. It will also help to meet the challenge of the expected future demand on the service.

Mr Shantanu Gudsoorkar, a consultant ophthalmic surgeon at Somerset FT, said:

“We’ve worked closely with healthcare planners at Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group and our ophthalmology colleagues at Yeovil District Hospital to develop a service that works for patients in Taunton, Yeovil and the rest of Somerset.

“This model of care allows the vast majority of our stable retinal and glaucoma patients to be seen at our centre with the decision-making process based on clinical data, such as visual acuity, eye pressure, optical coherence tomography, visual fields and wide-field retinal imaging.

“We have also introduced a specialist ophthalmology electronic medical records system called Medisight and have networked our ocular imaging systems across the five sites we operate from – Musgrove Park Hospital, Harrison House and the community hospitals at Bridgwater, Minehead and Chard. This allows our clinicians to access patient records and diagnostic data instantly on any site. Our consultants can provide immediate input regarding any urgent queries too.

“This seamless integration and accessibility of data across all five sites has been hugely beneficial allowing clinicians to work flexibly and provide patient care closer to home.”

Rachel Adams, an ophthalmology nurse practitioner at Somerset FT and the nurse project lead for Harrison House, said patients have already been giving great feedback about the new centre.

“This new diagnostic centre provides our patients with a one stop shop where they can have all their diagnostic tests,” she said. “Each test will take place during the same appointment, without needing to travel into the busy Musgrove Park Hospital site. The tests results will then be reviewed by the hospital clinicians and results will be sent to patients through the post.

“It’s staffed by a team of nurses and healthcare assistants with specialist training in retinal and glaucoma conditions, as well as administrators who will welcome and check in patients when they arrive at the centre.

“We wanted to ensure that the two centres have purpose-built environments where patients enter in one entrance and naturally move between different diagnostic stations during their appointment, before leaving through a separate exit.

“The facilities at the centre are state-of-the-art and our patients have told us they’ve found coming here to be a much-improved experience, particularly with the free parking.

“Our colleagues have told us that they are pleased to be able to work in multiple clinical areas that give them more career development opportunities, and they also like working within the new building as it has a larger staff room, changing facilities, and an all-round pleasant environment.”



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