Primary Eyecare

Reduction in travel-related carbon emissions using a Single Point of Access and triage service for ophthalmology referrals

Amy Hughes, Helen Haslett, Gayatri Nair, Vijay Balaji, Lisa Gibson, Rupesh Bagdai. *Primary Eyecare Services, UK*

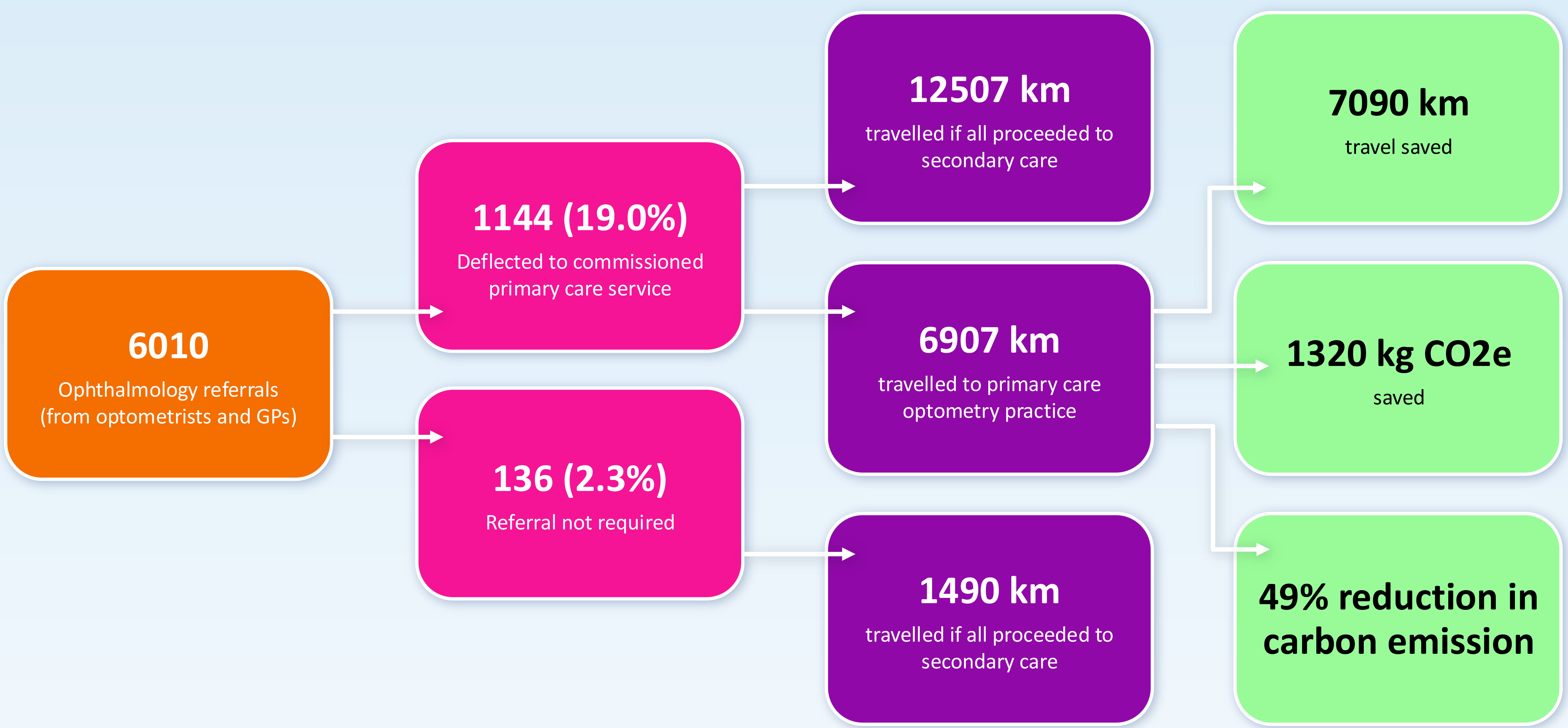
Introduction

- Healthcare is a major source of carbon emissions and, as the highest activity sub-specialty within the NHS, ophthalmology is a significant contributor to emissions.[1]
- The 2020 Greener NHS Programme aims for a net zero health service, including avoiding unnecessary journeys and accessing care closer to home.[2]
- Avoiding unnecessary or false positive referrals to secondary care is a priority to relieve the ever-increasing demand for appointments, reduce travel-related carbon emissions and save patients unnecessary travel.[3]
- Primary care optometry services have been shown to have a positive impact on reducing travel-related carbon emissions.[4]
- SPoA (Single Point of Access) hubs manage all speciality referrals through a single system, ensuring that patients are seen in the right place within the most efficient timescale, including deflecting appropriate referrals to secondary care by redirecting patients to commissioned primary care services.
- This study evaluates the reduction in travel-associated carbon emissions using a Single Point of Access (SPoA) to deflect appropriate ophthalmology referrals from secondary care.

Methods

- All ophthalmology referrals in Mid and South Essex are triaged by Primary Eyecare Services SPoA. Referrals are received through a number of routes:
  a) From primary care optometrists directly through the Primary Eyecare Services IT platform.
  b) From primary care optometrists via NHS email
  c) From GPs via eRS
- In pathway a, both the original and triaged referral destinations are known.
- In pathways b and c, the original secondary care destination was not available in service evaluation data, so this was modelled.
- Referrals from August to November 2024 were analysed.
- For deflections to primary care, the distance from patient's postcode to secondary care provider was compared to the distance to primary care optometrist.
- Referrals could be deflected to the following commissioned primary care optometry services: Glaucoma Enhanced Referral Service (GERS), Glaucoma Repeat Reading Service (GRRS) or Community Eyecare Service (CES) with or without optical coherence tomography (OCT).
- For referrals returned to the referring clinician suggesting alternate management including where referral may not be appropriate, the distance saved by avoiding an unnecessary secondary care visit was calculated.
- Carbon savings were calculated assuming car travel, broken down into diesel, petrol and hybrid/electric use, using the backing data sets of the NHSE's Healthy Outcomes of Travel Tool (HOTT).

Results



Conclusions

- Deflection of ophthalmology referrals to secondary care, either by deflecting to an appropriate commissioned primary care optometry service or because referral to secondary care was not indicated, led to a 49% reduction in both km travelled and the travel- associated carbon emissions.
- This initial analysis shows that SPoA services can positively impact the NHS's green strategy by shifting care from secondary to primary care and deflecting unnecessary referrals.
- There is substantial potential to further reduce travel-related carbon emissions and pressures on secondary care systems with the consistent commissioning of both SPoA and extended services in primary care optometry.

References

1. Wong, Y. L., Noor, M., & James, K. L (2021) . Ophthalmology Going Greener: A Narrative Review. Ophthalmology and Therapy. 2021; 10: 845–857.
2. NHS England (2022). Delivering a 'Net Zero' National Health Service. B1728-delivering-a-net-zero-nhs-july-2022.pdf
3. MacEwen, C., Davis, A. and Chang, L. (2019) Ophthalmology GIRFT Programme National Speciality Report.
4. Dinsdale, M. et al (2024). Primary Eyecare Glaucoma Service (PEGS): a mixed methods service evaluation. Eye, 38(18), 3481-3487.

To reference this work, please use the following citation: Hughes, A., Haslett, H., Nair, G., Balaji, V., Gibson, L. & Bagdai. R. (2025, 7th - 9th July). *Reduction in travel-related carbon emissions using a Single Point of Access and triage service for ophthalmology referrals* [Poster presentation] Oxford Ophthalmological Conference, Oxford, England. Reduction-in-travel-related-carbon-emissions-using-a-Single-Point-of-Access-and-triage-service-for-ophthalmology-referrals-Poster-FINAL.pdf