Exploring the lived experience of patients and non-patients, with defined vulnerabilities, accessing and using eye care services

General Optical Council

Patient vulnerabilities

Have an annual household income of less than £25,000

Not confident in managing their own eye health

Going through a difficult life circumstance

Consider themselves to have a disability

Consider themselves to be struggling financially

Patients with vulnerabilities often face inequalities accessing eye care and in their experiences when receiving care

Inequality of access

Low importance of maintaining eye health

High tolerance for, and self-management of, symptoms related to sight or eye health

Psychological barriers

Cost-related barriers

Inequality of experience

Participants also discussed having specific needs that influenced their sense of **satisfaction with their experiences** of having a sight test / eye examination.

These needs included...

- **Recognise** and **cater** for **hidden vulnerabilities** and **concerns**
- Feel a **thorough job** has been done
- Provide an **empathetic approach**
- Provide **continuity of care**
- **Transparency on costs**

Barriers to accessing eye care services influenced participants' decisions as to whether to seek a sight test/eye examination, and inequalities in their experience affected their satisfaction with the services they received

Participants' suggested interventions

These are the suggested interventions from research participants to help reduce barriers and improve experiences when accessing eye care services

Greater awareness and knowledge of eye health & benefits of routine sight tests/eye examinations

- **Education** about the **importance** of **maintaining good eye health**
- Establish **links between symptoms** and **eye health**
- **Accessible information** should be universally available

Greater transparency around costs

- Transparency around **costs of the sight test/eye examination, glasses and contact lenses**
- Raise awareness and provide clarity on **financial support** and **flexible payment** options
- Staff should be **mindful of their approach** to reduce sense of pressure to buy

Catering better for all patient vulnerabilities

- Consider **suitable adjustments** to appointments (length, environment and process)
- **Effective follow-up** for those with **additional needs**
- **Staff training** and **raising awareness** e.g. mental health first-aid

Greater continuity of care

- **Ability to select** their optometrist and see the **same healthcare professional again**
- **Better communication** between hospitals and optical businesses to improve care for those with known eye conditions

To read the full report please visit the GOC website: https://optical.org/