

Clarification on the use of cross-Health Board referral functionality in OPERAi

Following recent communications regarding the introduction of cross-Health Board ophthalmology referral functionality within OPERAi, we would like to provide some additional clarification to support consistent use across Wales.

The new functionality, due to be implemented on 5 August 2026, is a system enhancement that enables referrals to be sent electronically across Health Board boundaries where this is clinically preproperate and operationally permitted under current HB pathways.

It is important to emphasise that the introduction of this functionality does not alter existing referral pathways, service responsibilities, governance arrangements, or Health Board pathways.

The general principle in NHS Wales is that patients are normally referred to, and managed by, the Health Board in which they are resident. Patients requiring referral into WGOS 4, 5 and ophthalmology services should continue to be referred to the Health Board in which they are ordinarily resident. This remains the default position across Wales.

The cross-Health Board functionality has been introduced to facilitate specific circumstances where referrals outside the patient's resident Health Board are appropriate, including:

- Urgent referrals to local Eye Casualty, RACE or WGOS 5 IPOS Urgent where a patient cannot return to their resident Health Board in a clinically appropriate timescale.
- Specific existing operational arrangements for cross-Health Board referrals approved by the Health Boards involved.
- Where a patient is just about to change Health Board residency and future care within that new Health Board's WGOS or ophthalmology pathways may be appropriate.

The new functionality does **not** provide a mechanism for referring clinicians to determine referral destinations independently of existing pathway agreements or governance arrangements. Please continue to follow your local Health Board referral guidelines, agreed pathways and established referral processes.

Referrals submitted to an inappropriate Health Board, outside agreed pathways, will be rejected and returned in the same way that an incorrectly addressed paper, email or electronic referral would have been previously. Referring clinicians should therefore continue to follow established referral pathways and direct referrals to the appropriate receiving Health Board services.

We hope this clarification is helpful and supports a smooth implementation of the system change. Thank you for your continued support in delivering safe, effective and patient-centred eye care services across Wales.