Partnering with local charities and social services to provide a comprehensive sight loss support service in the eye clinic

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Southampton Sight
supporting people living with sight loss

OPEN SIGHT HAMPSHIRE Est. 1922

Over 100 years of making a difference to the lives of blind and partially sighted people across Hampshire

NHS University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust

Background

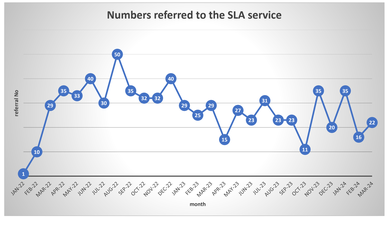
Over 300 adult patients a year are registered as either sight impaired (SI) or severely sight impaired (SSI) at this busy eye unit. Following loss of dedicated support for these patients in 2019 a joint initiative between the NHS, local sight loss charities and local authority social services, has re-imagined the support, rehabilitation and empowerment of patients living with visual impairments. Initial study of patients and staff to understand barriers to supporting patients led to the design of a sight loss advisor (SLA) course and slight loss awareness training for all staff. There are over 5 embedded sight loss advisors, including within paediatric ophthalmology and neurology. Ongoing oversight is provided by a stakeholder group from involved parties.

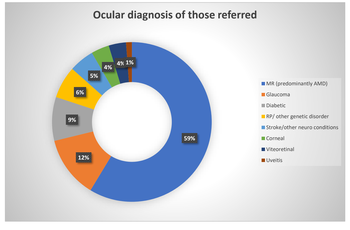
Methods

We assessed numbers of patients who had been referred to the service. The impact of the new sight loss advisor service and training was assed using electronic survey of staff, and interviews of patients carried out by our charity partners.

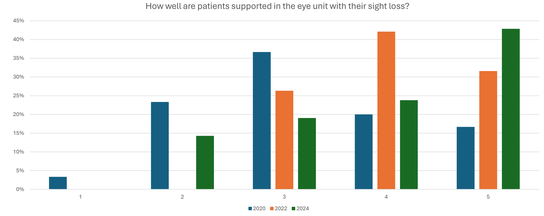
Results

Patients referred to the SLA service since it started in 2022 and the diagnosis of those referred





Results of staff survey in 2020, 2022, and 2024

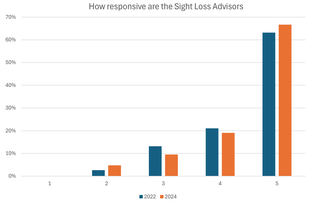


Results

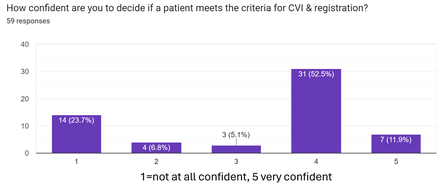
Over the first two years of the service we have supported 757 patients affected by sight loss. The most common diagnosis was AMD. The service for patients improved with 71% of staff feeling that this was good or excellent, increased from 37% prior to the service ($p<0.001$). 64% of staff were confident in assessing if a patient met the CVI criteria.

Interviews with patients showed that SLA intervention significantly increased their knowledge of support available ($p<0.001$), they were less anxious and understood there diagnosis better. 88% of patients were satisfied or very satisfied with the support from the SLA service.

Results of staff survey from 2022 and 2024

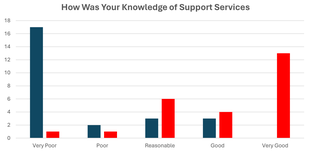


1=poor response, 5 excellent

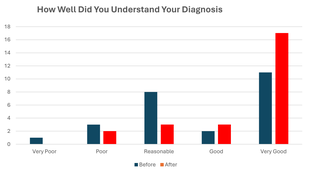


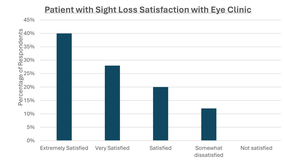
1=not at all confident, 5 very confident

Results of survey of 25 patients in 2024 who had recently used the SLA service.









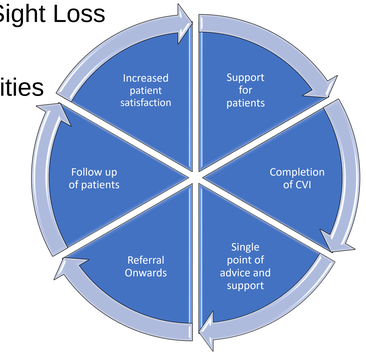
Message for Others

- We used the social model of disability which encourages patients to be independent and have choice and control over their lives, moving away from the traditional medical model wholly focusing on what is medically wrong.
- Training is provided by the local charities ensuring that we have strong links.
- The model of a Sight Loss Advisor service with close links to local charities and social services ensures smooth and rapid referral and support for patients.
- The model of clinic staff becoming SLAs provides career opportunities and ensures close links with clinical staff so that patients are referred proactively, including before SI registration to enable early intervention.

757 people supported by the Sight Loss Advisors in first year

705 referred to 19 local authorities

640 referred to local charities



Conclusions

This service has supported over 700 patients in its first 2 years. It is recognised by both staff and patients as being a supportive resource and improves the knowledge and reduces anxiety felt by patients. The SLA service will provide training to ensure staff understand CVI criteria and when to refer.

The SLA's provide an invaluable resource for staff and patients, empowering patient independent choice and control, moving away from the traditional medical model focused on the disease. The SLA program mirrors the core move towards shared decision making, not only listening to the patient but understanding their needs and signposting where appropriate.