South East London Single Point of Access: A new referral triage model enhancing equitable access to cataract surgery

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Introduction

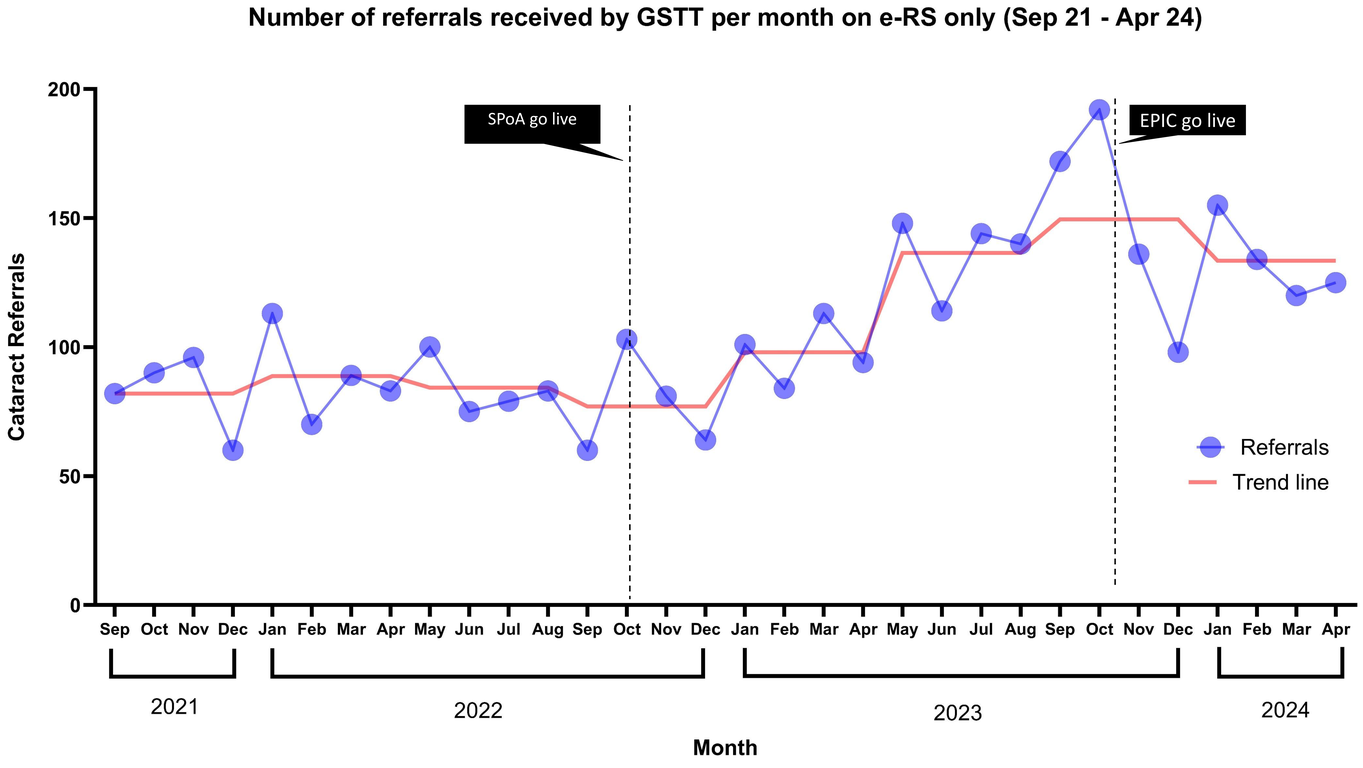
Over the last 8 years, the proportion of all NHS funded cataract surgery (CS) carried out by Independent Sector Providers (ISP's) has increased from 20% to 59%.

This has raised concerns regarding cataract surgery training and funding to NHS Ophthalmology departments, raising the risk of financial destabilisation of Eye departments.

Methods

The South East London Single Point of Access (SEL SPoA) was launched in September 2022 through the joint working between the South East London Acute Provider Collaborative (APC) and the Integrated Care System (SEL ICS).

This initiative mandated that all routine referrals to Hospital Eye Services (HES) were triaged by a centralised triage team. This process meant all NHS cataract surgery referrals from the community in the South East London region had to be processed by the SPoA, before referral to the appropriate cataract provider of the patient's choice. Crucially this pathway encourages the SEL ICS to only fund CS procedures that have been referred through this centralised system, thus discouraging direct referrals from optometrists to ISPs.





Results

Between September 2021 and October 2022, GSTT Ophthalmology department received a median of 83 cataract referrals per month.

Following the launch of the SPoA, from October 2022 to April 2024, GSTT received a median of 120 referrals, an increase of 44.6%.

Conclusions

These findings demonstrate that launching a SPoA has had a positive impact on maximising use of NHS resources.

This allows NHS hospitals to continue providing excellent training opportunities for the next generation of cataract surgeons and ensures financial viability of eye units.

Figure 1:
Graph depicting number of cataract referrals received by GSTT from September 2021 to April 2024.
Trend line depicts four-month average of referrals
SPoA went live in October 2022
EPIC: new electronic patient record went live in October 2024, temporarily reducing GSTT referral processing rate