Diabetic Retinopathy Screening

- Data from Local Delivery Plan Returns shows that by December 2007 85.7% of people diagnosed with diabetes were offered screening for diabetic retinopathy that met stringent national clinical standards of quality and safety in the previous twelve months.

- This shows that great progress has been made. More people with diabetes are being offered screening for retinopathy than ever before.

- The target to screen 100% of people diagnosed with diabetes for diabetic retinopathy had not been met by the end of 2007. We are providing support to the minority of Primary Care Trusts that have not met the target to ensure that all people with diabetes are offered screening to national clinical standards as quickly as possible.

- England, together with other UK countries, leads the world in diabetic retinopathy screening. This is the first time a population based screening programme has been introduced on such a large scale.

- The number of people with diabetes who were offered screening in 2007 (1.67 million) exceeds the number of people with diagnosed diabetes when the target was set. (There were 1.3 million people with diagnosed diabetes when the target was set in 2003. By December 2007, this figure had increased to 2.06 million).

- It is extremely difficult to meet any 100% target without exception, and by setting such stringent quality and safety clinical standards for screening we have made achieving this particular target even more challenging.

- We have prioritised quality and safety over chasing the target and will continue to work with partners in Government, the NHS and the voluntary sector to improve the standard and quality of screening programmes across the country.

Diabetic retinopathy

Diabetic retinopathy is the most common cause of blindness in working age people in the UK. If untreated, 50% of those who develop proliferative diabetic retinopathy will lose their sight within two years, and some of these within 12 months. Early detection of sight-threatening diabetic retinopathy and treatment (usually with laser therapy) halves the risk of sight loss.
This is why the *Priorities and Planning Framework 2003 – 2006 (PPF)* and *Diabetes NSF Delivery Strategy* both include a target that “by 2006, a minimum of 80% of people with diabetes to be offered screening for the early detection (and treatment if needed) of diabetic retinopathy as part of a systematic programme that meets national clinical standards, rising to 100% coverage of those at risk of retinopathy by end of 2007.”

**Progress**

Data from Local Delivery Plan returns indicate that 85.7% of people with diabetes have been offered screening for diabetic retinopathy in the previous 12 months (see attached data). Great progress has been made and more people with diabetes are being offered screening for retinopathy than ever before and to higher standards.

Many PCTs have achieved the target, with the vast majority offering screening to over 95% of people with diabetes.

Historically, screening was largely ad hoc, offered by some opticians, GPs and diabetes centres. In March 2005 only 13 programmes were undertaking systematic screening. The latest information from the National Screening Programme for Sight Threatening Retinopathy, however, is that – of 101 screening programmes – 75 are undertaking systematic screening on a significant scale with a further 26 programmes screening but not to fully systematic standards.

**National Clinical Standards**

In order to meet the target, screening programmes have to meet stringent national clinical standards to ensure safety and quality. These include:

- The screening test must be digital photography
- Screening staff must be appropriately trained and a clinical lead and programme manager must be in place
- Positive screening tests must be appropriately followed-up and there must be good links to both hospital and primary care
- People with diabetes must be invited to screening annually and the uptake rate must be at least 70%
- The programme must cover at least 12,000 people with diabetes
- Call and recall from a comprehensive managed list of those covered by the programme
- Participation in quality assurance

Our focus has been to prioritise quality and safety, by putting in place the full infrastructure to support efficient systematic screening to national clinical standards. We are committed to continuing to improve the coverage and quality of screening programmes across the country.
Screening for diabetic retinopathy has been included in the operating framework for the NHS in England 2008/9. Where PCTs are failing to deliver the standard set for diabetic retinopathy, they are obliged to agree recovery plans with their SHAs to ensure improvement. The Department of Health is actively working with and through SHAs to ensure that they have arrangements in place for delivery. This signals our commitment on this issue and the Department of Health will be following up to performance manage the delivery of the recovery plans with SHAs.