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The diabetic retinopathy screening programme: Uptake and reasons for non-attendance in Shankill Road GP Surgery, Belfast, Northern Ireland

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Introduction: The Shankill Road GP Surgery is located on the Shankill Road, a deprived, inner city area of north Belfast with approximately 2,500 patients. Screening takes place over 2 days in June or July every year.

Methods: A search was carried out using practice software to identify all diabetic patients in the practice who had been diagnosed before May 2016 and who were over equal to or older than 12 years of age, who had not attended diabetic retinopathy screening in 2016. Each patient was then contacted and reasons why they did not attend were recorded.

Results: Results showed a 62% attendance at retinopathy screening. The most common reason for not attending was that they were unable to attend the appointment given to them due to health reasons (22%); they had been seen by ophthalmology so thought that they did not have to attend screening (16%), denied non-attendance (16%), and could not attend on day of appointment (14%). Other reasons were that they forgot, never got a letter, or could not be contacted by phone after 4 attempts. Of 9 patients who thought they were exempt due to ophthalmology review, only 4 were actually up to date and the other 5 should have been attending. Of the 9 patients who denied non-attendance, records of missed appointments were confirmed by practice records and letters from the diabetic retinopathy screening programme.

Conclusion: Many patients were unaware of the importance of retinopathy screening especially if they had not experienced sight problems, highlighting need for education from GPs and in the community. The most common reason for non-attendance was poor health, yet many patients were unaware how to re-organise a screening appointment if they were unable to attend.