

New centre aims to support eye patients

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PATIENTS needing regular eye injections for macular conditions no longer need to travel into Musgrove Park Hospital for appointments.

It follows the opening of a macular treatment centre at Harrison House, on Blackbrook Park, Taunton, in the same building as the ophthalmology diagnostic centre, where people with retinal conditions and glaucoma can get tested in one place.

The macular treatment centre, run by Somerset NHS Foundation Trust (FT), has been funded and equipped through a joint project between the trust and global life science company Bayer, with support from the Musgrove's League of Friends.

Consultant ophthalmic surgeon Shantanu Gudsoorkar, who specialises in macular diseases, said: "Our macular team at Musgrove Park Hospital provides vision saving eye injection treatment for patients with wet age-related macular degeneration, diabetic macular oedema and retinal vein occlusion.

"Over the last five years there has been a growing demand for the treatment of macular conditions in Somerset because of an increasing elderly population and better diagnostic equipment within community-based and high street opticians.

"Our service gets 40 new referrals every month. We have



Inside the new macular treatment centre at Blackbrook Park. Picture: Duncan Maclachlan

2,500 patients under our care who need regular appointments and treatment – twice the number of patients since 2017.

"Our skilled macular nurse practitioners performed 12,000 injections in 2022, compared with 6,000 in 2017.

"As a result, our macular service has outgrown the assessment and treatment areas in our eye clinic at Musgrove.

"The available space in our existing ophthalmology diagnostic centre was the natural choice as our elderly visually-impaired patients could access it easily and it's also future proofed to meet the increasing demand."

Rachel Adams, ophthalmology outpatient department senior sister at Somerset FT, said:

"This is a real game changer for our patients as it means over 300 patients a week can have their diagnostic investigations for macular, glaucoma and macular treatment at Harrison House, instead of at a busy hospital.

"When Harrison House opened last spring, we future-proofed it to ensure we had that extra space that we could grow into, so this is our natural next step."

Rose Gilbert, senior medical advisor, ophthalmology, Bayer UK, said: "This joint working project involved Bayer and the trust pooling skills, experience and resources to ensure this innovative facility maximises capacity to treat patients to reduce the wait time to first treatment and

enable timely follow up treatment, both vitally important to help patients get the most out of their treatment."

League of Friends chairman Peter Renshaw said: "The funding of £220,000 from the League has enabled more patients with eye problems to be seen on the Blackbrook Park site, thereby easing pressure on the hospital to deal with more acute cases."

Building contractor Spellier Metcalfe, which delivered the ophthalmology diagnostic centre in 2022, completed the new macular treatment centre.



The opening of the new macular treatment centre. Picture: Duncan Maclachlan



The new macular treatment centre. Picture: Somerset NHS Foundation Trust