

**Sir,  
 Are junior doctors in today's NHS competent in  
 managing ophthalmic cases in the emergency  
 department?**

In a 2003 national survey of the management of eye emergencies in the accident and emergency department, Sim *et al*<sup>1</sup> found that 63.9% of senior house officers in the UK had little or no confidence in dealing with ophthalmic cases. Surprisingly, this proportion was unchanged from a previous similar national survey conducted by Tan *et al*<sup>2</sup> in 1993, despite the significantly higher availability of slit lamps in the departments and increased training on their use. Furthermore, there was no significant difference in the prevalence of training in the management of eye emergencies between the two studies. Hence, Sim *et al* rightly pointed out that the shift to a more competency-based training brought about by Modernising Medical Careers (MMC) could serve as a platform to enhance confidence and competence in managing ophthalmic emergencies. However, to our knowledge, there is no recent national survey similar to the aforementioned surveys, which begs the question: has anything changed over a decade on?

The introduction of MMC and the European Working Time Directive (EWT) has led to many inexperienced foundation year 2 trainees having to deal with ophthalmic cases.<sup>3</sup> Given the relative frequency of ophthalmic presentations to the emergency department, this points to the fact that suboptimal care is unacceptable, just like it would be for an acute cardiac presentation. Several identified issues have contributed to the poor confidence of junior doctors in dealing with eye emergencies. First, the deficit in basic ophthalmic training can be traced back to the undergraduate years where ophthalmology education is very limited owing to increased emphasis on core specialties and soft skills such as communication skills. Second, there is a lack of formal structured teaching of junior doctors in managing ophthalmic presentations to the emergency department, including the use of slit lamps or fluorescein staining, owing to time constraints and variable shift patterns. Third, there is no general consensus on the baseline core ophthalmic competencies expected of junior doctors allocated to a four month A&E rotation. Furthermore, there is no clear national guidance or protocol on the management of ophthalmic presentations in the different departments across the country.

In conclusion, we believe that a national survey is required to assess the current state of ophthalmic care delivered by junior doctors in the emergency department. Findings from the survey would form a basis for the need for a higher investment in resources, including finances and manpower, and organizational changes on a national level to improve ophthalmology training and supervision in the emergency department. This will ultimately ensure optimal ophthalmic care but also reduce out-of-hours ophthalmic workload in the department.

**Conflict of interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

**References**

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*Eye* (2016) **30**, 164; doi:10.1038/eye.2015.193;  
 published online 9 October 2015

**Sir,  
 Comment on 'The accuracy of the Edinburgh Red Eye  
 Diagnostic Algorithm'**

We congratulate the authors on the creation and evaluation of their Red Eye Algorithm, for use in primary care settings.<sup>1</sup> This algorithm suggests that bilateral red eyes, with signs and symptoms of infective conjunctivitis, should be given 2 weeks of chloramphenicol drops before review by their GP. However, we would suggest that, because of its prevalence and wider health implications, primary care practitioners should be encouraged to consider the possibility of chlamydial conjunctivitis and initiate investigations when appropriate.

It is estimated that the proportion of patients presenting with acute infective conjunctivitis in secondary care, diagnosed with chlamydial conjunctivitis, is around 2.5–5.6%.<sup>2</sup> However, it can be as high as 10% in 16–20 year olds<sup>3</sup> and up to 34%<sup>4</sup> among patients referred to some ophthalmology clinics.

We performed a retrospective audit of eye swabs, taken from last 300 patients referred to our Emergency Eye Care clinic, with apparent acute infective conjunctivitis. We found 15% tested positive on Chlamydial PCR. The proportion of positive swabs varied significantly according to age, with 29% of positive swabs taken from those aged 20–29 years, compared with 1% from those aged 40 years and over (see Table 1).

One would not wish to encourage mass screening of all conjunctivitis. However, the decision to swab for chlamydia is driven by specific features of the history including patient demographics, asymmetry and chronicity of symptoms, along with characteristic signs