The Royal College of General Practitioners clinical priority on eye health: End of project survey - summary analysis of UK data

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Introduction

The Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) selected eye health with a focus on ageing and sight loss as one of their clinical priorities for three years, from 2013 to 31 March 2016.

The aims of the eye health clinical priority programme included reducing preventable sight loss amongst patients aged 65 plus, to help improve their quality of life; and to provide more effective management of patients with eye conditions.

The RCGP appointed a Clinical Champion, Dr Waqaar Shah, to lead this programme in partnership with the RCGP and the UK Vision Strategy.

A survey was run at the start of the Clinical Priority programme (November 2013 to January 2014) to establish levels of awareness of General Practitioners (GPs)
and their Practice Teams with regards to managing the eye health of their patients and the needs of their patients with sight loss.

The survey was run again at the end of the programme to establish whether levels of awareness of General Practitioners (GPs) and their Practice Teams had changed following the three year programme.

This report reflects the results of the end of programme survey and compares the results of the final survey with that carried out at the start of the Clinical Priority programme.

Methods

An online survey of General Practitioners (GPs) and primary care practice staff was conducted between January 2016 and February 2016. Participants were invited to complete the survey via an email sent to all the Royal College of GPs 50,000+ members and via a targeted marketing and public relations programme including RCGP blogs and emails to the RCGP Eye Health Network of 600 interested GPs.

The survey was administered in SurveyMonkey. This report presents analysis of the UK-wide data. Throughout the report percentages are given when the base sample is greater than 20. For samples sizes smaller than 20, whole numbers are reported.

Results

Please note that the survey results should be treated with caution as:

- the number of respondents for the final survey was significantly lower than the original survey
- the characteristics of survey respondents in the final survey were different to the original survey
- the final survey also included GPs from the RCGP Eye Health Network (which was set up during the project and therefore didn’t exist when the first survey was carried out).

However, the following results do provide insight into the impact of the RCGP programme.

Key findings:
• There has been an increase of 21 per cent in the confidence of health care professionals and GPs to spot signs and symptoms of Refractive Error.

• There has been a 16 per cent increase in the confidence of non-GP healthcare professionals to spot signs and symptoms of Cataracts, but no difference among GPs.

• There has been a 14 per cent increase in the confidence levels of health care professionals and GPs to spot the signs and symptoms of Age-related Macular Degeneration.

• There has been a 12 per cent increase in the confidence of non-GP healthcare professionals to spot signs and symptoms of Diabetic Retinopathy, but almost no increase among GPs.

• There has been an 11 per cent increase in the confidence of non-GP healthcare professionals to spot signs and symptoms of Glaucoma, but almost no difference among GPs.

• GPs on the Eye Health Network are more confident than non-network GPs at spotting the signs and symptoms of AMD and Glaucoma.

• The vast majority of respondents were confident in where to refer a patient for further investigation. However, only just over half felt confident where to refer patients for help and support managing their sight problem or eye condition.

• There has been an increase in the accessibility of practices – there was a 15 per cent increase in the number of GPs reporting that their practice provides at least one alternative accessible format for information regarding bookings and attending appointments, and a 16 per cent increase in GPs reporting that signage, newsletters, and reception information is available in accessible formats.

• There had been no improvement in the number of GPs offered training on how to support patients who were blind and partially sighted.

• Awareness of the Clinical Priority Programme increased across healthcare professionals (34 per cent final survey, 19 per cent original survey). Members of the Eye Health Network were more aware of the outputs of the programme. The most common engagement with the programme was
through the One Day Essentials, the Sight Loss Guide, and the RCGP faculty eye health event in Cardiff (note that some faculty events took place after the survey had closed)

**Respondent characteristics**

In the original survey, 296 people responded to the survey. Of these, 194 were based in England (66 per cent), 78 in Scotland (26 per cent), 19 in Wales (6 per cent) and 5 in Northern Ireland (2 per cent).

In the final survey, 83 people responded to the survey. Compared to the original survey there was a higher proportion of GPs from England and Wales. Of the 82 respondents, 62 were based in England (76 per cent), 8 in Scotland (8 per cent), 11 in Wales (13 per cent) and 1 in Northern Ireland (1 per cent).

There was also a higher proportion of GPs in the final survey (82 per cent compared to 69 per cent in the original survey). In the original survey, there were 10 GPs with a special interest in ophthalmology (3 per cent), whereas there was only 1 GP with a special interest in ophthalmology (1 per cent) in the final survey.

The original survey also had a higher proportion of nurses and only three respondents identified themselves as nurses in the final survey. Therefore, the results compare overall respondents in the final and original surveys, and GP responses, but there is no comparison for nurses.

In the final survey, 35 per cent answered yes to being members RCGP Eye Health Network.

**Number of years in current profession**

In the original survey, a third of respondents (34 per cent) had been practising for more than 20 years, and about a quarter (24 per cent) had been practicing for less than 5 years. In the final survey, only 17 per cent were people practicing for more than 20 years, and the largest proportion (36 per cent) had been practicing for less than 5 years. Therefore, the final survey represents a less experienced group of GPs than the original survey.

Table: Number of years in current profession – original survey versus final survey
Base: original survey n=296, final survey n=83

Detailed findings

Engagement with the RCGP Programme

In the original survey only one fifth (19 per cent) were aware of the RCGP clinical priority for eye health with a focus on ageing and sight loss. In the final survey, this increased to a third of respondents who were aware of the RCGP clinical priority for eye health with a focus on ageing and sight loss (34 per cent, 28 respondents).

This was mirrored with GPs. In the original survey, a fifth of GPs (20 per cent) were aware of the RCGP clinical priority for eye health with a focus on ageing and sight loss. In the final survey, this increased to a third of GPs (32 per cent). This suggests that the programme did raise the awareness of the priority across health care professionals.

Respondents were asked if they were aware of the following literature and events relating to the RCGP Clinical Priority for Eye Health. Almost one third (31 per cent, n=27) had attended or read one of the elements of the RCGP programme. Only 15 per cent (n=13) were not aware of any of the RCGP programme elements. The most common engagement with the programme was from the one day essentials (12 respondents attended), the sight loss guide (9 respondents reported reading this), and the RCGP faculty eye health event on the 8th December (9 respondents attended). There was also high awareness of the one day essentials, the pulse live events, and the webinars.
Given the small number of respondents who engaged with each of the various elements, we need to be cautious about the following findings. However, the table below suggests that respondents tended to find the faculty events; the one day essentials, and the sight loss guide the most useful elements. Open comments suggest that the programme elements were useful as they raised awareness and knowledge of eye conditions and the signs and symptoms to recognise them.

In the final survey, RCGP Eye Health network members had a greater awareness of more bespoke elements of the RCGP Eye Health programme such as the Sight Loss Guide, the eye health webinars and the RCGP eye health faculty events. 48 per cent of members were aware or had engaged with the Sight Loss Guide compared to 19 per cent of non-members. 45 per cent of members were aware or had engaged with the eye health webinars compared to 25 per cent of non-members. 41 per cent were aware or had engaged with RCGP Faculty eye health events compared to 25 per cent of non-members.

(Table on next page)
Table: How useful were the programme events and resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Very useful</th>
<th>Somewhat useful</th>
<th>Not useful</th>
<th>Not applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sight loss Guide</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webinar</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty events</td>
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<td>5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>78%</td>
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<tr>
<td>One day essentials</td>
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<td>12%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>74%</td>
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<td>Pulse live events</td>
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<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westminster health forum</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of patients with related conditions

In the final survey, respondents were asked how many patients in an average week present with conditions (as their primary concern) that can be related to the person’s eye health. On average, 7 patients per week presented with diabetes as their primary concern, followed by 4 per week patients presenting with problems with their eyes, 4 patients presenting with an injury as a result of a fall and 3 patients whose primary concern was as a result of a stroke. Annually this is approximately 360 patients with diabetes, 200 with eye problems, 200 with falls, and 150 with strokes.

Professionals ability to recognise the symptoms or signs of eye conditions

Age related macular degeneration

In the original survey, just over a third of respondents (28 per cent) were confident (i.e. responded 'somewhat confident' or 'very confident') they could spot the symptoms or signs of age related macular degeneration (AMD) compared to just under half (42 per cent) in the final survey. In the original survey, a third of GPs (34 per cent) were confident (i.e. responded 'somewhat confident' or 'very confident') they could spot the symptoms or signs of age related macular...
degeneration (AMD) compared to around two fifths (43 per cent) in the final survey. This suggests that there has been an increase in the confidence of health care professionals and GPs to spot signs and symptoms of AMD.

There was a notable difference in the proportion of RCGP Eye Health Network members who were confident (i.e. responded 'somewhat confident' or 'very confident') they could spot the symptoms or signs of age related macular degeneration (AMD) compared to non-members. In the final survey, a half (52 per cent) of members were confident compared to 38 per cent per cent of non-members.

Please note that the numbers within each of these categories are very small (members n=29, non-members n=53) therefore conclusions about the comparisons between the two groups are presented to provide some insight but findings should be interpreted with caution.

**Cataracts**

In the original survey, just under three quarters of respondents (72 per cent) were confident (i.e. responded 'somewhat confident' or 'very confident') they could spot the symptoms or signs of cataracts compared to 88 per cent in the final survey. A large majority of GPs (90 per cent) were confident they could spot the symptoms or signs of cataracts. A similarly high proportion of GPs were confident they could spot the symptoms or signs of cataracts in the original survey (91 per cent). This suggests that there has been an increase in the confidence of non-GP health care professionals to spot signs and symptoms of cataracts, but no difference amongst GPs.

There was a small difference in the proportion of RCGP Eye Health Network members who were confident (i.e. responded 'somewhat confident' or 'very confident') they could spot the symptoms or signs of cataracts compared to non-members. In the final survey, 90 per cent were confident compared to 85 per cent per cent of non-members.

**Diabetic retinopathy**

In the original survey, 41 per cent of respondents were confident (i.e. responded 'somewhat confident' or 'very confident') they could spot the symptoms or signs of diabetic retinopathy compared to 53 per cent in the final survey. In the original survey, half of GPs (49 per cent) were confident they could spot the symptoms or signs of diabetic retinopathy, compared to 53 per cent. This suggests that there has been an increase in the confidence of non-GP health care professionals to
spot signs and symptoms of diabetic retinopathy, but almost no difference amongst GPs.

There was a small difference in the proportion of RCGP Eye Health Network members who were confident (i.e. responded 'somewhat confident' or 'very confident') they could spot the symptoms or signs of diabetic retinopathy compared to non-members. In the final survey, 59 per cent members were confident compared to 51 per cent per cent of non-members.

**Glaucoma**

In the original survey, 43 per cent of respondents were confident (i.e. responded 'somewhat confident' or 'very confident') they could spot the symptoms or signs of glaucoma compared to 54 per cent in the final survey. In the original survey, half of GPs (51 per cent) were confident they could spot the symptoms or signs of glaucoma, compared to 53 per cent. This suggests that there has been an increase in the confidence of non-GP health care professionals to spot signs and symptoms of glaucoma, but almost no difference amongst GPs.

There is a notable difference in the proportion of RCGP Eye Health Network members who were confident (i.e. responded 'somewhat confident' or 'very confident') they could spot the symptoms or signs of Glaucoma compared to non-members. In the final survey, two thirds of members (66 per cent) of members were confident compared to half of non-members (49 per cent).

**Refractive error**

In the original survey, 40 per cent of respondents were confident (i.e. responded 'somewhat confident' or 'very confident') they could spot the symptoms or signs of refractive error compared to 61 per cent in the final survey. In the original survey, half of GPs (49 per cent) were confident they could spot the symptoms or signs of refractive error, compared to almost two thirds (65 per cent) in the final survey. This suggests that there has been an increase in the confidence of health care professionals and GPs to spot signs and symptoms of refractive error.

There was very little difference in the proportion of RCGP Eye Health Network members who were confident (i.e. responded 'somewhat confident' or 'very confident') they could spot the symptoms or signs of refractive error compared to non-members. In the final survey, 62 per cent of members were confident compared to 60 per cent per cent of non members.
Management of eye conditions and the role of health professionals in supporting patients

Comparing GPs’ attitudes to management of eye condition across the original and final survey, we can see that there has been a greater change in the attitude in health care professionals’ perception of their role in eye health promotion and addressing eye health in their work in other health conditions. However, changes in GPs’ attitudes were less pronounced and there was little or no difference detected in many of their attitudes.

Referral routes for patients presenting with concerns about sight problems or eye conditions

In the final survey, respondents were asked if they knew where to refer patients for help and support if they needed further investigation for their sight problem or eye condition.

The vast majority of respondents (96 per cent, n=52) who provided an answer said they knew where to refer a patient for further investigation.

Respondents were also asked if they knew where to refer patients for help and support if they needed help to manage their sight problem or eye condition. Over half (53 per cent, n=30) of the respondents to the question felt they were able to refer patients on.

The results suggest that respondents need further guidance and training on where to direct their patients who need help to manage their sight loss or eye conditions. It should also be noted that 35 per cent did not give any answer to ‘further investigation’ and 31 per cent did not give any answer to ‘help managing their eye condition’.

Management of eye conditions and the role of health professionals in supporting patients

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‘Eye health promotion and education to prevent avoidable sight loss is an important part of my role’

- There was an increase between all respondents that agree or strongly agree with this statement (original survey 62 per cent, final survey 78 per cent);
- There was also an increase in the number of GPs that agree or strongly agree with this statement (original survey 63 per cent, final survey 76 per cent)

‘Eye Health is addressed as part of my work around obesity, falls, diabetes and smoking’

- There was an increase in the proportion of all respondents who agree or strongly agree with this statement (original survey 58 per cent, final survey 65 per cent);
- There was almost no change in the proportion of GPs who agree or strongly agree with this statement (original survey 60 per cent, final survey 62 per cent).

‘Supporting (through guiding, educating, encouraging compliance) my patients to comply with their eye health medication is a vital part of my role’

- There was a small increase in the proportion of all respondents who agree or strongly agree with this statement (original survey 72 per cent, final survey 79 per cent);
- However, there was almost no change in the proportion of GPs who agree or strongly agree this statement (original survey 76 per cent, final survey 78 per cent)

‘I think it is important that I ask my patients about their sight’

- There was an increase in the proportion of all respondents who agree or strongly agree with this statement (original survey 74 per cent, final survey 81 per cent)
- There was no change in the proportion of GPs that agree or strongly agree with this statement (original survey 76 per cent, final survey 76 per cent);

The provision of accessible information by practices

In the original survey, fewer than half of respondents (43 per cent) said their practice provided at least one alternative accessible format for information regarding bookings and attending appointments. In the final survey, more than half (58 per cent) said their practice provided at least one alternative accessible format for information regarding bookings and attending appointments. This
suggests that more practices are providing more alternative accessible formats for patients.

Table: Information regarding bookings and attending appointments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Original survey</th>
<th>Final survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Standard</td>
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<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Print</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: total number for original survey n= 296. and total number for final n= 78

In the original survey, 41 per cent said general information about the practice (signage, newsletter, and reception information) was available in accessible formats compared to 57 per cent in the final survey. These findings suggest that more practices are providing more alternative accessible formats for patients.

Table: Information about the practice in different formats

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Original survey</th>
<th>Final survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standard</td>
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<tr>
<td>Audio</td>
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<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: total number for original survey n=296 and total number for final n= 79

In the original survey, a quarter of respondents (26 per cent) had been offered training on how to support patients who were blind and partially sighted. In the final survey less than a quarter (22 per cent) had been offered training on how to support patients who were blind and partially sighted.

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