Practice patterns in age-related macular degeneration (AMD)

Angelica Ly1,2, Lisa Nivison-Smith1,2, Barbara Zangerl1,2 and Michael Kalloniatis1,2
1Centre for Eye Health, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, 2School of Optometry and Vision Science, UNSW Australia, New South Wales, Australia

Purpose
• AMD is a leading cause of blindness worldwide and primary eye-care providers play a critical role in its recognition and management.
• However, AMD cases may still be mis-diagnosed or not suitably managed for a variety of reasons.
• There is also a paucity of published data on current practice patterns in the primary care detection of AMD.
• This study explored the perceived utility of advanced imaging and contemporary clinical practice patterns regarding AMD using a cross-sectional survey of optometrists.

Methods
• An anonymous survey was distributed online to practicing optometrists in Australia and New Zealand using Survey Monkey.
• The survey focused on five key areas:
  • Demographics (questions 1-10)
  • Clinical skills and experience (questions 11-19)
  • AMD assessment (questions 20-21)
  • AMD management (questions 22-30)
  • Evidence based practice (questions 31-32)

Results
• A minimum of 178 responses were required to represent the 4752 and 690 practicing optometrists in Australia and New Zealand respectively at a 95% confidence level and a 10% confidence interval.
• Data from 214 questionnaires completed in its entirety were included in the analysis.
• Average exposure to AMD cases was 11% or 4 patients/week.
• At least 63% of respondents expressed above average or excellent competency in diagnosing and managing AMD and performing traditional techniques such as slit lamp funduscopy.

Discussion
• Optometrists self-report high levels of practice competency and knowledge.
• Based on a high frequency of responses, routine optometric assessment of AMD patients is consistent with currently available optometric standards and grading scales.2,4
• Advanced imaging modalities and functional tests were considered relevant to AMD though performed less often.
• Awareness of clinical guidelines was low overall, which may relate to more than half of the respondents indicating nutritional supplements as relevant in early AMD.

Conclusion
In health systems where optometrists provide primary eye care, a suitable level of diagnostic accuracy and evidence based management is required. These results highlight a clinical paradigm shift toward advanced imaging and the use of OCT in the assessment of AMD.

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