Patient and Clinician Perspectives of Ophthalmology Emergency Attendances during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Introduction

A concerning result of the COVID-19 pandemic has been a drop in patient presentation to emergency departments, including ophthalmology departments, due to fear of infection. Although there are peer reviewed publications describing the impact COVID-19 on ophthalmology practice with recommendations for future re-organisation, there is a distinct lack of prospective studies examining both patient and clinician perspectives on the effect of COVID-19 on emergency ophthalmology attendances and delays in presentation.

Aim

To assess whether the 2020 COVID-19 national lockdown and fear of contagion may have deterred patients from seeking emergency eye care from both the clinician and patient perspective.

Methods

- A single-centre, cross-sectional prospective study was carried out between May to June 2020 at the eye emergency department (eye ED) of Imperial College London Healthcare Trust.
- The study comprised a two-part patient and clinician survey per ED attendance (fig. 1).
- Weekly patient eye ED attendance numbers were retrieved from the electronic health record (Cerner, Cerner Corporation, USA) and were compared between corresponding weeks from all of 2019 and 2020.

Patient questions	Clinician questions
When did you first notice your eye problem?	Does this presentation appear to be delayed?
Has COVID-19 stopped you from attending A&E earlier?	Did the patient require urgent treatment in casualty?
If yes, why are you attending now?	Did the patient require urgent referral to be seen within 2 weeks of A&E attendance?
If you could have a video consultation instead of attending A&E, would you have preferred this?	Was the condition appropriate for video consultation?
	Was the condition sight threatening?

Fig. 1: Survey questions

Results

The survey period covered 4433 attendances. 513 survey responses were collected from patients and 456 (89%) of these also had completed clinician surveys, giving a survey ascertainment rate of 10%.

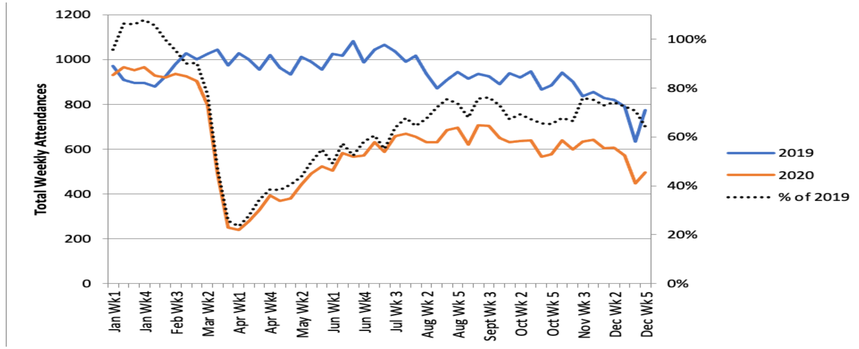


Fig. 2: Weekly total eye emergency department attendances throughout 2019 and 2020. Dotted line denotes percentage 2020 of 2019 attendances.

		Clinician's opinion on if presentation was delayed, n(%)		
		Yes	*No*	*Total*
Patient's opinion on if presentation was delayed, n(%)	*Yes*	25 agree	107	132 (29%)
	No	18	277 agree	295 (65%)
	Not sure	7	21	28 (6%)
	Total	50 (11%)	406 (89%)	456 (100%)

Fig. 3: Patient vs. clinician opinion on whether they felt their presentation was delayed

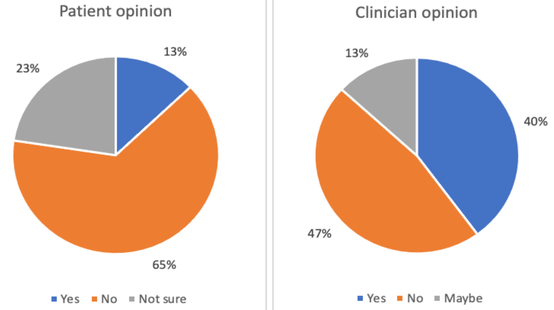


Fig 4: Patient vs. clinician opinion on whether they felt a video consultation would have been appropriate for the presenting complaint

Conclusions

The start of the March 2020 lockdown saw a large drop in eye ED attendances. 11% of clinicians and 29% of patients felt they had delayed their presentation as a result of COVID-19. This suggests that an alternative to face-to-face consultation would be beneficial. However, it was interesting to see that 65% of patients did not feel that video consultations, a commonly accepted alternative, would be appropriate. Future work will entail trialling a period of eye ED triage via video consultations to see if this system would be feasible but also acceptable to our patients.