The opportunity of independent sector treatment centres for cataract training

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Purpose

- Cataract surgery is the most performed surgical procedure in the NHS, with 486,212 procedures reported to NHS Digital from centres in England between April 2021 and March 2022[1].
- Being able to perform cataract surgery independently is a core requisite of Ophthalmology training. Speciality Trainees (STs) are required to complete a minimum of 350 cases by the end of their training[2].
- Recent data shows an increase in NHS cataract surgery being carried out in independent sector treatment centres (ISTCs), which reduces training cases for STs in NHS hospitals.
- The Royal College of Ophthalmologists National Ophthalmology database (NOD) performs a national cataract audit every year. By reviewing the data, we can provide insight into changes in training provision.

Methodology

- Data published by the NOD from 2017 to 2022 was reviewed and analysed.
- Data published by the 2022 GMC National Training Survey was reviewed.
- A literature review was performed looking at the trend in NHS cataract surgeries being done by ISTCs.

Results

- Since 2017 the proportion of NHS cataract surgeries performed in the independent sector has increased from approximately 20% to 50% in 2021, and the trend is showing no sign of reducing (figure 1)[3]. More recent data from 2022 shows ISTCs are now performing 59% of NHS cataract surgeries[4].

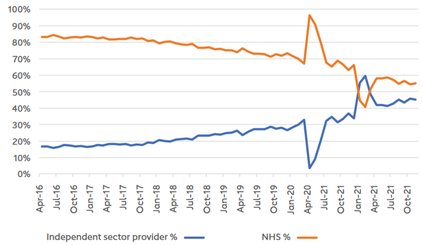


Figure 1: Proportion of NHS-funded cataract procedures delivered by ISTCs and NHS hospitals.

- The mean case complexity index, which denotes the risk of surgical complications, has increased in NHS hospitals from 1.5 to 1.8, whilst remaining the same in the independent sector at 1.3[1,5-8].
- The GMC's 2022 National Training Survey, completed by almost 600 STs, found that the proportion of trainees who had not completed 50 or more cataract cases by end of their ST2 year has increased from 12% in 2019 to 35% in 2022[8], and the proportion of cataract surgeries performed by trainees recorded by the NOD has almost halved[1,5-7].
- The 2021-2022 NOD audit show that 1/96 ISTCs provided training opportunities, and only for senior trainees with no ISTCs providing training opportunities for junior trainees[1,5-7].
- 8% of trainees in the 2023 GMC training survey reported that they were able to access cataract surgical training in the ISTCs, however this is well below the 60% of trainees who felt that this was needed[9].

Conclusion

- Current data suggests that the independent sector is currently operating on more than half of NHS cataracts, which are of lower complexity, with no increase in the training of specialty registrars.
- These routine cases are vital for the training of specialty registrars, especially juniors.
- The ISTCs are an ideal training location for STs due to the high number of routine cataract surgery cases, whilst NHS hospitals are more suited to STs later in their training when exposure to more complex cases is required.
- Closer collaboration is needed between all NHS cataract surgery providers to deliver appropriate training for future ophthalmic surgeons.

Disclosures & References

Disclosures: None to declare for all the others.

References: