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IS THE FUTURE OF OPHTHALMOLOGY TOO BRIGHT FOR ITS OWN GOOD? A LOOK INTO THE VIEWS OF MEDICAL STUDENTS REGARDING OPHTHALMOLOGY AS A CAREER.

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INTRODUCTION

HEE's Application Report demonstrates that competition for speciality training has never been more difficult, attributed to an exponential rise in applications with no significant change in the number of training posts; none more so apparent than in ophthalmology.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Competition for ST1 ophthalmology posts has risen to 14.41, raising concerns about access to training and applicant diversity. High competition may deter underrepresented students. Ensuring fair access is vital for a diverse and sustainable workforce.

AIM

We aim to observe student views on ophthalmology, and if this has influenced their decisions of applying for postgraduate training.

METHODOLOGY

An anonymous 16-question survey using a 5-point Likert scale and free text boxes was distributed to medical students at 5 UK universities (n=60) as a non-probabilistic convenience sample.

Questions were directed at their demographic, with ophthalmology-specific questions on lifestyle, prestige, the scope of practice, exposure and clinical relevance at medical school.

RESULTS

47 students completed the survey (response rate of 78.7%). Our key findings:

- 78.7% reported poor exposure
- 74.4% found teaching not clinically relevant
- 76.6% viewed the lifestyle as better than other specialities
- 93.3% were dissatisfied with the training pathway
- 63.8% were not deterred by rising competition

CONCLUSION

Students have overwhelmingly positive views about ophthalmology, its lifestyle and its impact on patient life, but felt a distinct lack of relevant teaching which did not aid clinical practice.

However, this has not dissuaded students from applying for training, which will yield further obstacles and increased competition. Greater importance must be shed on increasing training posts to prevent difficulties in recruitment, with constraints anticipated on working hours, understaffing and poor working conditions.

64% of students believe that increased competition ratios have not deterred them from pursuing a career in ophthalmology.

