Ophthalmology as a specialty – a growing star or waning interest?: A multicentre evaluation of trends in interest among UK medical students in London

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Purpose

Ophthalmology is arguably an overlooked speciality within UK medical school curricula, despite accounting for the largest proportion of outpatient appointments across all specialities and 2% of all primary care consultations (Rawlings et al., 2024; Veeramani et al., 2024).

Whilst ophthalmology remains highly competitive in the UK (NHS England, 2023), there is a perception that medical students are unable to manage ophthalmic conditions. This stems from the current non-mandatory status of ophthalmology in the undergraduate curriculum, coupled with a paucity of data assessing medical student's ophthalmology competency levels (GMC, 2018).

Methods

During the academic year of 2023/2024, London-based UK medical students were invited to complete a cross-sectional questionnaire. This was disseminated through official university emailing lists and social media. The questionnaire consisted of 13 questions evaluating various themes including respondent's demographics, ophthalmology exposure, level of ophthalmology knowledge, and career interest. Statistical analysis was performed via Mann-Whitney U-Test using IBM SPSS software.

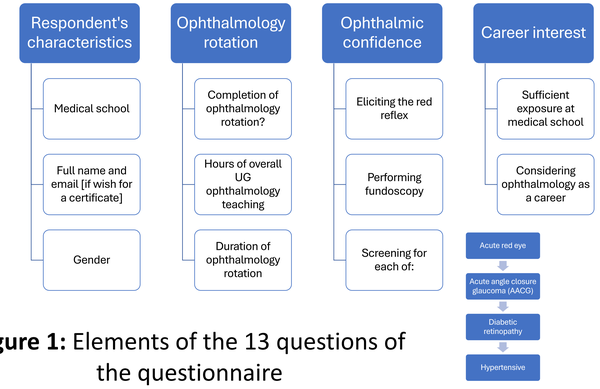


Figure 1: Elements of the 13 questions of the questionnaire

Results

- 126 medical students were included in the analysis with 54% females with 4 London medical schools represented
- Grade of respondents ranged from final-year (16.2%), fourth-year (33.3%), third-year (19.2%), pre-clinical years (31.3%)
- 44% of respondents reported completion of their clinical ophthalmology rotation
- Participants who had finished their rotation exhibited a significantly greater degree of confidence than those who had not yet in all queried ophthalmology-related competencies (all **p<0.05**) (Fig 3)
- 78.3% respondents who completed their rotations still perceived their ophthalmology exposure as insufficient (Fig. 4)
- 63.6% of all respondents indicated career interest in ophthalmology (Fig.5)

Figure 2: Student respondent distribution

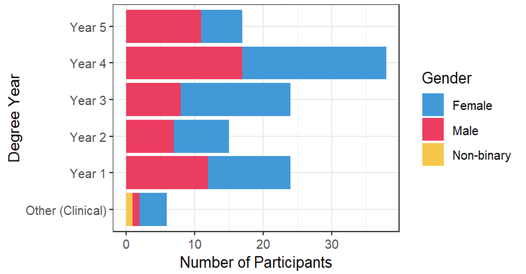


Figure 3: Respondent's confidence in ophthalmic-related competencies

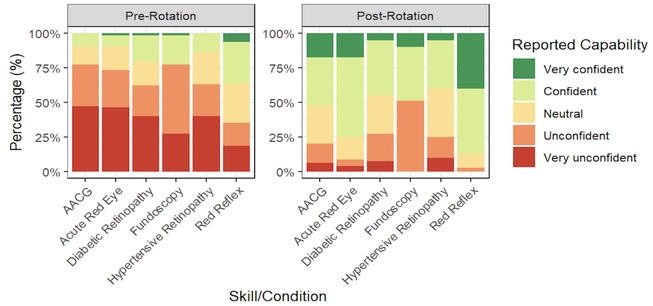


Figure 4: Student perspectives re: 'Is undergraduate ophthalmology exposure sufficient?'

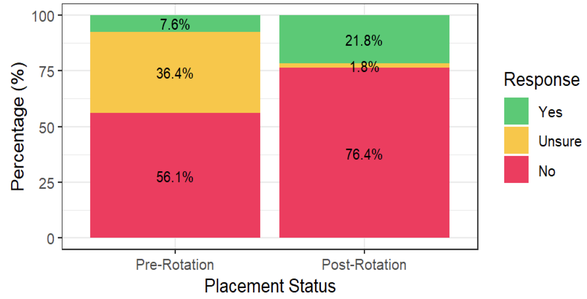
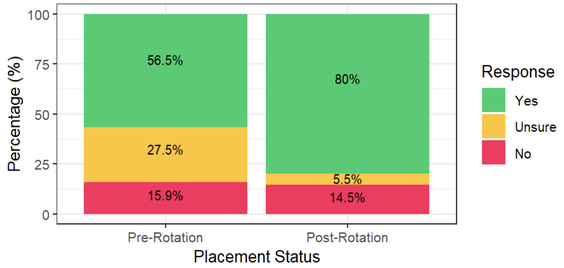


Figure 5: Student perspectives re: 'Would you consider a career in ophthalmology?'



Conclusion

- We highlight a significant appetite for ophthalmology education and specialty interest, underscoring a gap educators may hope to bridge through spiral revision of ophthalmology and fostering constructive discourse regarding potential curriculum changes within the medical education community.
- Current teaching modalities have contributed to increased confidence levels towards ophthalmology, however, we contend that there is significant potential for further enhancement, particularly regarding the amount of time devoted to ophthalmology as a specialty within the medical curriculum.

References

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