The ROYAL COLLEGE of OPHTHALMOLOGISTS

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How can the RCOphth values of inclusion, innovation, improvement and integrity help to improve eye care

Royal College of Ophthalmologists Essay Prize for Foundation Doctors

The case and challenges for improving eye care

Global Urgency: The Lancet Global Health Commission on Global Eye Health highlights eye health's impact on quality of life and achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals.[1]
National Urgency: Ophthalmology is the NHS's busiest outpatient speciality, facing rising demand and workforce shortages.[2]
Strategic Response: The RCOphth's 2024-27 strategy aims to lead globally in eye care, grounded in the values of inclusion, improvement, innovation and integrity.[3]

Inclusion

- *actively welcoming a diversity of experiences and perspectives*
- *everyone being respected and encouraged to participate regardless of their background or role*

Workforce diversity:

The RCOphth is addressing disparities in outcomes and leadership representation through reverse mentoring,[4] cultural awareness training, and improved recruitment for underrepresented groups.[5]

Equity in patient care:

Initiatives like translated resources, Eye Care Liaison Officers, and VCSE partnerships are improving access for marginalised and underserved groups, reducing delays and complications in eye care.[6,7]

Improvement

- *being a learning organisation, reflecting on both successes and mistakes*
- *continuous and sustainable development across all its activities*

Culture of learning:

RCOphth fosters continuous improvement through updated clinical guidelines (e.g., for angle-closure glaucoma),[8] education platforms like INSPIRE, [9] and reforms to the ST curriculum and ePortfolio,[10] and modernising systems such the British Ophthalmological Surveillance Unit (BOSU).

Sustainable innovation:

Sustainability initiatives such as greener procurement, patient-initiated follow-ups, teleophthalmology and scaling pilots such as surgical "eco-packs" can help achieve NHS net zero 2040.[11]

Integrity

- *being open and honest, demonstrating accountability in all its work*
- *evidenced-based and transparent decision-making, utilising a range of data, information, expertise and experience*

Patient safety and accountability:

National audits and safety alerts (e.g., AMD audit,[12] Burkholderia cenocepacia and carbomer-containing eye gels November 2023[13]) demonstrate RCOphth's transparent, data-led approach to ensure patient safety.

Trust and collaboration:

Evidence-based practice, ethical leadership, and cross-sector partnerships (e.g., on cataract training [14] and policy advocacy [15]) are building lasting trust across the system.

Innovation

- *creating novel opportunities to advance and deliver on its aims, anticipating changing circumstances*
- *actively welcoming fresh ideas and approaches*
- *fostering a climate of ambition and excellence drawing on expertise from across the College's communities*

Tech-driven advances:

AI diagnostics[16], handheld OCT for hard-to-reach populations,[17] and gene therapies like Luxturna[17] are revolutionising eye care delivery and access.

Smarter care models:

Teleophthalmology, virtual surgical training, and collaborative models (e.g., Aravind Eye System) are enhancing efficiency, education, and global equity in eye care.[18]

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