

Assessing Variation in Ophthalmology Teaching and Exposure in Undergraduate Medical Education

Maia Elhariry, Amr Badawy, Mohammed Athif Khan, Akash Doshi, Mind The Bleep Team



BACKGROUND

Ophthalmology remains a competitive speciality requiring early and structured exposure to influence medical students' interest and preparedness. Despite its competitiveness, exposure to Ophthalmology in the undergraduate curriculum is minimal, especially in comparison to other specialities. Exposure to ophthalmology, as well as other key factors during medical school and beyond, can affect students' decisions to pursue ophthalmology.

OBJECTIVES

This study aimed to evaluate ophthalmology exposure among medical students in the United Kingdom (UK) and its influence on their likelihood of pursuing Ophthalmology as a career. It also aimed to identify factors which can influence this decision,

METHODS

A national cross-sectional survey was administered to final-year UK medical students attending ophthalmology-focused sessions hosted by Mind the Bleep (MTB), a national free educational platform, from December 2024 to April 2025. The survey assessed curricular coverage, teaching quality, alignment with United Kingdom Medical Licensing Assessment (UKMLA) standards, and the impact of these factors on career decision-making. Quantitative responses were analysed using SPSS software, while thematic analysis of free-text responses was conducted in NVivo.

RESULT

Of the 193 respondents, 176 UK-based students were included. Ophthalmology education as a whole was rated poorly in the domains of curricular coverage (mean 2.94/5), teaching support (mean 2.95/5), and alignment with learning needs (mean 2.96/5). A more detailed analysis of external factors influencing students' career intentions revealed that both exposure to ophthalmology (mean 3.86/5, 0.95 Standard Deviation [SD]) and the perceived quality of teaching (mean 3.76/5, 0.95 SD) were positively associated with an increased likelihood of pursuing the speciality. Qualitative responses highlighted work-life balance, placement quality, and career prospects as major additional influences.

Question	Mean Score	SD
Curriculum Coverage		
How well is <i>each topic</i> covered by your medical school teaching?	2.94	0.96
How well is <i>ophthalmology overall</i> covered by your medical school teaching?	2.95	0.96
Teaching Quality & Availability		
Awareness of UKMLA content and recent changes	3.01	0.93
Does your university provide adequate support and teaching?	2.95	0.88
Does your university/instructor cater to your learning style?	2.96	0.84
Impact on Career Choice		
Does your exposure to ophthalmology affect your likelihood to pursue it?	3.86	0.95
Does teaching on ophthalmology affect your likelihood to pursue it?	3.76	0.95

Table 1. Summary of Medical Students' Ratings on Ophthalmology Teaching and Its Impact as per their responses to the questionnaire

CONCLUSION

Undergraduate exposure to ophthalmology significantly impacts students' speciality preferences, though current exposure is perceived as insufficient. Enhancing structured ophthalmology teaching and aligning curricula with national standards may encourage more students to consider the speciality. Broader educational reforms should incorporate lifestyle, mentorship, and placement experiences to support informed and equitable career decision-making.