UK contact lens practice for children and young people survey

We carried out a survey of UK practising members to gain information about practitioner attitudes and behaviours relating to contact lens prescribing for children and young people. 748 optometrists responded to the survey which was carried out between October and December 2013.

Why did we do it?

We wanted to understand attitudes and behaviours towards prescribing contact lenses for children and young people. Until now this information about UK optometrists has not been available. These results can be used to build a picture of what is happening in practice, helping all optometrists understand how their prescribing habits compare with colleagues. The results can also be used as a benchmark to measure changes in the future.

Summary of key findings

• 92% of responding UK optometrists fitted contact lenses to patients under the age of 18.
• As a primary form of correction, 0.4% reported that they would recommend contact lenses for under 8 year olds, 1.4% for 8-9 year olds, 7.1% for 10-12 year olds, 24.1% for 13-14 year olds and 44.6% for 15-17 year olds.
• Respondents believed that the maturity of the child was more important than age in deciding whether they were suitable to be prescribed contact lenses. This view is supported by recommendations on prescribing in other studies¹,².
• Other important factors optometrists take into account are the child’s interest and motivation to wear contact lenses, the child’s ability to take care of contact lenses and their personal hygiene habits.
• The majority of respondents ranked daily disposable contact lenses as their first choice when fitting children and young people.
• Nearly 60% said that interference with sports and other activities was the main reason given by parents asking for contact lenses, with self esteem factors being reported by just over a quarter of respondents.

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International comparisons

The results from this survey can be used to make comparisons with the prescribing habits of optometrists in other countries. For example, a survey was performed by the American Optometric Association (AOA) in 2010 and the results from both surveys can be compared to see how UK and American optometrists differ in their practice. Initial comparisons show that for every age group, UK optometrists are less likely to prescribe contact lenses as a principal form of correction than US colleagues.

How might the research affect you in practice?

Having the opportunity to understand what colleagues are doing with regard to their practice in a particular area is a useful chance to reflect upon your own practice:

- To what extent is your behaviour aligned with this general pattern?
- What do you regard as the most important factors in determining whether it is appropriate to recommend contact lenses to a child / young person?
- Do these findings make you think differently about your approach, or increase your confidence in your current approach?

Let us know your views on the findings and any suggestions for further research on this topic by emailing the research team: research@college-optometrists.org.

Read the full report

To view the full report, visit www.college-optometrists.org/research.

What next?

We will continue to identify opportunities for further research which will help us to build the evidence base for this area of practice. We also plan to support members by expanding our range of peer discussion case studies on this topic. We have already published ‘child with contact lenses’ which members can access at www.college-optometrists.org/peer-discussions.

References:

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