

## Newsdesk

### British Ophthalmological Surveillance Unit

The British Ophthalmological Surveillance Unit (BOSU) has recently published its first year report on its initial pilot studies in four areas: loss of vision in the non-amblyopic eye, sympathetic ophthalmia, a cohort study of stage 3 retinopathy, and the incidence of acanthamoeba keratitis. BOSU as a concept was initially proposed by ophthalmologists from St Thomas's Hospital London and quickly taken on by the Royal College of Ophthalmologists. Essentially the scheme is a reporting card system whereby all registered ophthalmologists in the UK report positively or negatively on a monthly basis on their experiences in any of the above projects with the aim of gathering information nationwide on conditions that are not common and for which there is not much information concerning causes and outcomes in common practice. Each project is targeted for a 12 month period and new projects are added as older projects come to an end. Individual departments in the UK act as a reporting centre for each condition depending on their interest and expertise. So far the scheme has achieved reporting rates up to 70% and as more ophthalmologists become used to the system a higher return rate is expected. It is likely that much new and important information will be obtained using the BOSU scheme particularly with true estimates being possible of the potential morbidity from conditions such as sympathetic ophthalmia and acanthamoeba keratitis as well as establishing a pool of clinical research resource.

### Consumer survey of private practice

The magazine *Health Which?* has recently reported the results of a survey of the practice of 60 consultant surgeons, including ENT surgeons, ophthalmologists, and orthopaedic surgeons, in the UK from several different regions, which sought to establish how much time was spent by each surgeon working for the NHS and how much working in private practice. The results indicated that on average surgeons spent two and a half days a week on private practice work and surgeons with the longest waiting lists did most private work. However, the authors of the report admitted that it was impossible for the researchers to find out how surgeons actually spent their time or to obtain information on what type of contract each surgeon held with the NHS employing authorities. The chairman of the British Medical Association's private practice committee, Derek Machin, felt that there was an "orchestrated attack" on consultant surgeons and is asking the Consumers Association to refute its findings.

### Heinz Wassle named 1998 Golden Brain

Heinz Wassle has been awarded the 1998 Golden Brain award by the Minerva Foundation for his work on processing and transmission of visual information by the eye. Wassle is director of the Department of Neuro-anatomy at the Max Planck Institute for Brain Research in Frankfurt, Germany. His research has been based on applying biochemical techniques to the study of the chemical composition and the interactions of cells in the retina. He has shown that transmission of brightness, contrast, colour, and motion detection is performed by different sets of cells simultaneously. Bipolar cells provide the parallel transmission systems, while horizontal cells and some 30 different types of unipolar nerve cells provide a complex network of feed forward and feedback loops for anticipating, measuring, and taking action somewhat similar to the workings of a microchip.

### Wellcome Trust funds magnetoencephalography research

The Wellcome Trust, currently the world's largest medical charity, has provided £1.5m to fund the establishment of an advanced magnetoencephalography facility at the clinical neurophysiology unit at Aston University, Birmingham, UK. The trust's infrastructure panel is supported by the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFC) in this award. Magnetoencephalography can provide a high resolution three dimensional map of the active brain. The image is built up from the small magnetic fields set up when electrical impulses are transmitted along neurons. Computer reconstruction of images obtained from multiple fields simultaneously at durations of a thousandth of a second provides the means to produce whole brain images. The current machine used by the Aston unit can only image parts of the brain and the new machine will enable the entire brain to be imaged "at one go".

The Wellcome Trust spends some £250 million annually on medical research and supports more than 3000 researchers at 300 locations in 30 different countries—laying the foundations for healthcare advances of the next century.

### Training in low vision

The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association has recently won European Commission funding through the Leonardo da Vinci programme to develop a comprehensive package of training and education in low vision for a range of professionals. The programme will be tailored specifically for ophthalmologists, ophthalmic nurses, orthoptists, optometrists, and dispensing opticians all of whom could be involved in the rehabilitation management of the visually

impaired. There will also be a distance learning component to the programme to enable busy professionals to take part. Several workshops are planned for various regions of the UK. Contact Jane Kippax at the School of Vision and Rehabilitation Studies, GDBA, Hindhead, Surrey, GU26 6SJ.

### Primary eye care

Blinding disease persists as a major health and socioeconomic problem worldwide, particularly in developing nations. For many of these conditions prevention through primary eye care is the best approach and is entirely possible with properly organised primary eye care services for minimal cost, according to Dr Clare Gilbert in a recent editorial of the journal *Community Eye Health* (1998;11:17). Primary eye care follows from primary health care which depends on basic public health issues such as education, promotion of food supply and good nutrition, and an adequate supply of safe water and basic sanitation, in addition to vaccination programmes and adequate supplies of essential drugs. Tailoring the eye disorders to specific groups of health-care workers is important—for instance, trachoma prevention can involve many people from teachers and community leaders while cataract and glaucoma may require community based rehabilitation workers. This broad based multidisciplinary approach is more likely to be effective than deploying highly skilled medical and nursing personnel. Engaging many types of individual not normally associated with primary eye and health care is the modern approach and may spread the net of effective care much wider. As part of this drive there is currently a global initiative for the elimination of avoidable blindness under the apt name of "Vision 2020—the Right to Sight" which is part of a collaborative effort of the World Health Organisation's programme for the prevention of blindness and deafness.

### Global theme issue

The 1999 global theme issue will be "Impact of new technologies in medicine". Prospective authors please consider submission for this issue.

### Thanks

The *BJO* was very sorry to lose its editorial assistant, Mary Morrison, who has moved from Aberdeen to Southampton to take up a new career. Mary has been with the *BJO* since the editorial office moved to Aberdeen in 1992 and she was instrumental in many of the changes which have occurred within the journal. Her unstinting devotion and quiet skill at times of pressure were the foundation of a very successful partnership. We wish her all the very best in her new life.



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