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The editors will decide as before whether to also publish it in a future paper issue.

Disappearance of eyelid xanthelasma following oral simvastatin (Zocor)

The major risk factors for coronary heart disease include smoking, elevated blood pressure, and elevated serum cholesterol. Risk reduction starts with identification of those at risk and then alteration of factors such as discontinuation of smoking, lowering of blood pressure, and reduction of serum cholesterol. Patients who should have a blood cholesterol testing include those with family history of premature coronary heart disease or hyperlipidaemia, personal history of coronary heart disease, or clinical evidence of elevated lipids with features of xanthelasma, corneal arcus under age 50 years, and cutaneous xanthomas at any age. Two of the latter clinical features are ophthalmic and detection relies on the ophthalmologist.

Xanthelasma appear as multiple yellow plaquelike lesions in the periorcular skin and represent a concentration of lipocytes in the dermis. There are numerous methods to manage the cosmetic appearance of xanthelasma, which typically involves surgical excision or laser ablation. We report a novel approach to management using oral cholesterol lowering medication and patience.

Case report

In 1992, a 68 year old male smoker with a history of hypertension and elevated serum cholesterol was referred for evaluation of a newly diagnosed iris mass. On examination, the visual acuity was 20/20 in both eyes. The mass was diagnosed as a benign iris naevus and observation was advised. Coincidental bilateral medial canthal and upper and lower eyelid xanthelasma were detected (fig 1A). The largest xanthelasma measured 16 mm in diameter. Observation was advised with tentative plan for surgical excision in the future. The patient was advised to continue his antihypertensive medications and antihypertensive lipid lowering medication (oral simvastatin (Zocor) 20 mg once daily). At the 6 month follow up the iris nevus was stable and the xanthelasma persisted. Yearly examinations were advised. The patient did not return for 10 years. Surprisingly, the xanthelasma had completely resolved, leaving no clinical trace of subcutaneous lipid (fig 1B). He continued on his medications and serum cholesterol was normal.

Comment

In the Lipids Research Clinics Program Prevalence Study, xanthelasma and corneal arcus were associated with increased levels of serum cholesterol and low density lipoprotein cholesterol (LDL-C), especially in young males. People with either lesion had increased odds of having type IIa dyslipoproteinaemia. Adjusted odds ratios for ischaemic heart disease in participants with xanthelasma and corneal arcus were generally increased. The study concluded that the clinical findings of xanthelasma or corneal arcus, especially in young people, helped to identify those with plasma lipoprotein abnormalities.

Management of patients with elevated LDL-C include both low cholesterol diet and cholesterol lowering medications, the most popular of which are the statins. There are currently five statin drugs on the market in the United States and these include lovastatin (Mevacor, Altocor), simvastatin (Zocor), pravastatin (Pravachol), fluvastatin (Lescol), and atorvastatin (Lipitor). The major effect of these medications is to lower LDL-C by slowing down the production of cholesterol and by increasing the liver’s ability to metabolise the LDL-C in the blood. Statins reduce LDL-C by approximately 40% and produce a modest increase in high density lipoprotein-cholesterol (HDL-C). These medications are given daily in the evening to take advantage of the fact that the body makes more cholesterol at night. Statins reduce measured blood LDL-C within 4–6 weeks. In a study of 20 536 patients, this resulted in long term reduction in coronary heart disease, stroke, and mortality.

Simvastatin is derived synthetically from a fermentation product of Aspergillus terreus. Simvastatin is hydrolysed to an inhibitor of an enzyme responsible for cholesterol synthesis. In the Multicenter Anti-Atheroma Study, simvastatin slowed the progression of atherosclerosis, measured by vascular stenosis diameter on angiography, and decreased significantly the development of new lesions.

To our knowledge, there have been no previous reports on the effect of statins on eyelid xanthelasma. A PubMed search for keywords “statin and xanthelasma” and simvastatin and xanthelasma yielded no relevant publications. The management of eyelid xanthelasma includes surgical excision, microsurgical inverted peeling, laser inverted resurfacing, photovaporisation using carbon dioxide laser, and application of bichloracetic acid. Patients with the highest recurrence rate are those with elevated cholesterol. These local treatments do not address possible systemic associations. By observations in this report, we suggest that serum cholesterol be evaluated and if elevated, oral statin combined with dietary cholesterol restriction might result in resolution of xanthelasma over time, but, more importantly, reduction of patient cardiac risk.

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doi: 10.1136/bjo.2004.053058

Accepted for publication 13 September 2004

Support provided by the Eye Tumor Research Foundation, Philadelphia, PA (CLS), the Macula Foundation, New York, NY (CLS), the Rosenthal Award of the Macula Society (CLS), and the Paul Kayser International Award of Merit in Retina Research, Houston TX (JAS).

References


New onset diplopia: 14 years after retinal detachment surgery with a hydrogel scleral buckle

In 1979, the hydrogel explant (Mirarel, Waltham, MA, USA) was introduced as a scleral buckling material in the surgical management of retinal detachment. It was widely used in the 1980s and early 1990s as it was initially believed to be well tolerated, less prone to infection, and easy to manipulate. However, long term complications related to swelling and fragmentation of the explant have been reported over recent years, resulting in discontinuation of its use in 1995.

Case report
A 36 year old healthy man presented on 2003 with symptoms of mild right ocular discomfort. Past ocular history included a right retinal detachment repair 14 years previously, using a 907 (3 x 3 mm) Mirarel scleral buckle (Mirarel, Medical Instruments Research Associates, Waltham, MA, USA), sutured to the inferior sclera. On examination, visual acuity was 20/120 right and 20/20 left. There was no diplopia or limitation of eye movements. What was thought to be a small conjunctival cyst was noted inferiorly but, otherwise, the ocular examination was unremarkable and the retina was free of disease.

A year later (2004), he presented with increasing marked right ocular discomfort and diplopia in all fields. His visual acuity was unchanged, but there was marked restriction of elevation and reduction in adduction of the right eye and binocular diplopia in all fields of gaze. A tense swelling of the inferior conjunctiva was noted (fig 1, top), intraocular pressure was normal, and the retina was flat with a moderate anterior vitreous. Scleral thinning and inclusion cyst. The correct diagnosis was only made intraoperatively. Scleral thinning and necrosis as seen in our case has been reported previously, resulting in intraoperative vitreous leak after removal of the expanded explant. In our patient, there was an area of thinned sclera, but the surrounding calcification and the early removal of the explant prevented vitreous leak.

It is important to note that patients who have undergone scleral buckling with hydrogel explants before 1995 are at risk of developing this complication. Symptoms of progressive diplopia, pain, and restriction of extraocular muscle movement in these patients should also raise the possibility of explant expansion. The assistance of a retinal surgeon may sometimes be required because of the increased risk of scleral thinning and leakage of liquid vitreous intraoperatively.

References
8 Metz HS, Rose S, Burkert C. Late-onset progressive strabismus associated with a hydrogel scleral buckle. J AAPOS 2004;8:72–3

Inverse globe retraction syndrome complicating recurrent pterygium

Often larger and more aggressive than the original lesion, recurrent pterygium can cause visual symptoms that are most often secondary to their mechanical effects on the cornea. We report a case of inverse globe retraction syndrome (that is, retraction during abduction) due to the restrictive effect of a recurrent pterygium and the management of this complication.

Case report
A 28 year old man without a medical history or ocular symptoms underwent pterygium excision to his left eye with a superotemporal conjunctival autograft and intraoperative mitomycin C. Three weeks postoperatively, he noted a feeling of pressure in the left eye...
and diplopia during left gaze. Two months postoperatively he presented to us and his ophthalmic examination was significant for the following—right eye: 2 mm enophthalmos relative to right eye, recurrence of the pterygium, globe retraction during left gaze secondary to a leesh effect from the recurrent pterygium, and minimal abduction deficiency (fig 1). One month later, his examination was stable and surgery was scheduled. Intraoperatively forced ductions showed —1 (on a scale of 1 to 4) limitation of abduction in the left eye. The left eye was positioned in abduction and a 6 mm vertical incision was made in the nasal conjunctival 3 mm posterior to the limbus. A 5 x 6 mm graft of amniotic membrane (locally procured and kept frozen before use) was sutured in the resultant gap in the conjunctiva using 9–0 monofilament absorbable sutures. A panoramic view of the left eye was achieved. The conjunctival autograft with adjunctive mitomycin C; however, because aggressive recurrence is still possible initial pterygium surgery should only be performed for patients with significant cosmetic and/or functional concerns. For the management of inverse globe retraction syndrome complicating recurrent pterygium in this case, the use of amniotic membrane as a tissue spacer permitted excellent functional improvement.

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doi: 10.1136/bjo.2004.053850

Accepted for publication 2 September 2004

References


Seeing is not believing

We describe a case of posterior cortical atrophy presenting with progressive visuo-perceptual and visuospatial difficulties, but with no abnormalities on standard ophthalmological examination.

Case report

The patient, a 53 year old right handed woman, with well controlled primary generalised epilepsy, presented to her optometrist with a 1 year history of deterioration in vision. She had particular difficulties with walking downstairs and following text while reading. She could read 6/12+2 RE (with —0.75,—0.25=+90 correction) and 6/12+3 (with —0.75 correction) LE. With +2.25 correction she could read N5 slowly with each eye. On subsequent ophthalmological review no significant abnormality was found on examination and no specific diagnosis was made.

Over the following months her vision deteriorated. She reported difficulties following a line while writing and was unable to tell when a glass was full when pouring a drink. Her husband thought that she was unable to see things in her peripheral vision. This culminated in her crashing her car. She did not have any memory difficulties, she had preserved insight, and there had been no change in personality.

On admission to our unit her visual acuity was 6/18 RE and 6/12 LE with the above correction. She was able to read slowly at N5 corrected with each eye but was unable to name any of the Ishihara plate numbers including the test plate, despite being able to name the colours, trace the outline of the numbers with her finger, and read numbers in normal print. Confrontation visual fields were essentially full although she was slow to recognise objects in her peripheral visual fields owing to an apparent narrowing of attention to foveal vision and had optic ataxia, in that she was unable to localise in space, by pointing, objects placed in her peripheral visual fields. On Goldmann perimetry her visual fields appeared somewhat constricted, probably related to her difficulties with attention, but, importantly, no hemianopia was demonstrated (fig 1). Pupillary responses were normal as was fundal examination. On eye movement testing she had broken smooth pursuit eye movements, although she was able to generate voluntary saccades. The rest of the neurological examination was unremarkable.

Her mini-mental state examination score was 28/30. She had some deficits in verbal abstract reasoning and made occasional phonemic errors in speech. She had mild dyscalculia and dyspraxia, but she was able to differentiate left from right and name body parts. She had mild memory impairment, although these were mainly in tasks requiring visual input. She demonstrated simultanagnosia in that she was unable to see the whole of a picture and only described parts of it.

On testing with the cortical vision screening test she passed the hue discrimination test, the word reading test, face perception test, the crowding test of letter reading and was able to detect the presence of a circle in the shape detection test but was unsure what to say if it was not present. On the symbol
which has been reported before in similar cases. She had no abnormalities on ophthalmological examination. She had some features of Balint’s syndrome (that is, simultanagnosia and optic ataxia) and other cognitive deficits. Her poor distance visual acuity test her Snellen equivalent was 6/18 with each eye, despite being able to read text at N5, which suggested that she had more difficulty in identifying shapes than words. She failed tests of shape discrimination and size discrimination to indicate bilateral occipital dysfunction and also failed tests of scattered dot counting and segmented numbers to indicate right parietal dysfunction.

Blood tests and cerebrospinal fluid examination were both normal. Magnetic resonance imaging demonstrated cerebral atrophy most marked in the both posterior parietal and occipital lobes (fig 2). A diagnosis of posterior cortical atrophy was made.

Comment

This woman therefore presented with progressive visuo perceptual and visuospatial difficulties, but had no abnormalities on ophthalmological examination. She had some features of Balint’s syndrome (that is, simultanagnosia and optic ataxia) and other cognitive deficits. Her poor distance visual acuity may have been related to her poor visuospatial ability, given her good, albeit slow, near vision. Her inability to recognise any of the Ishihara plates, with otherwise normal colour vision, is probably a reflection of her other visuo perceptual difficulties, which has been reported before in similar patients, although difficulty with figure-ground discrimination cannot be excluded.

Posterior cortical atrophy is a clinical and radiological diagnosis based upon the presence of occipitoparietal abnormalities with initially preserved occipitotemporal (face and colour recognition) and anterior cerebral function. It is thought to be as a result of Alzheimer’s disease, in most cases, although the syndrome has been described with other pathologies—for example, subcortical gliosis, Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, and progressive multifocal leukoencephalopathy. Although it is rare, it should be suspected in any patient presenting with visuo perceptual or visuospatial difficulties in the absence of any signs on standard ophthalmological examination. Screening tests for higher visual function deficits can then be employed.

The corollary of this is that a patient with an established diagnosis of dementia should be tested for disorders of higher visual function, because a patient with otherwise mild cognitive deficits may still be driving.

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Accepted for publication 28 September 2004

References

signs of CRVO (fig 2A). Based on positive results of RON in CRVO, we offered this treatment to our patient. After the signed an informed consent, RON was performed with two radial cuts at the nasal edge of the optic disc. After 2 days disc oedema was significantly reduced with sharp visible disc margins. Two months postoperatively the retinal haemorrhages, cotton wool spots, and disc oedema in the visualized and her VA improved to 20/25 RE (fig 1C). FA demonstrated a physiological AV perfusion time of less than 3 seconds and no signs of an occluded cilioretinal artery (fig 2B).

**Comment**

Combined cilioretinal artery occlusion and CRVO are discussed as a separate clinical entity in the literature,1,2 and its treatment by RON has not been described. Opremcak et al postulated that a surgical decompression of the optic disc and scleral ring by RON may contribute to an improved venous perfusion in CRVO. Our patient demonstrated additional signs of an arterial occlusion with delayed filling of the cilioretinal artery in the macula, which may induce permanent functional loss. The underlying pathomechanism of CRVO remains unknown, current discussion leans towards an intraluminal occlusion by a thrombus, increased extravascular pressure, or a combination of both as possible causes.3 In addition the therapeutic effect of RON is also questionable. It remains unclear as to whether RON causes a decompression of the optic disc increasing the ocular blood flow or induces the formation of new chorioretinal shunt vessel.4 In our case the goal of RON was to reduce the capillary pressure, therefore increasing the perfusion in the cilioretinal artery and thus improving central vision. Patients with combined occlusive AV disease may benefit from RON by improving their haemodynamic perfusion pressure, retinal anatomy, and consecutive central visual function.

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doi: 10.1136/bjo.2004.045858
Accepted for publication 20 October 2004

Financial support: none.
Proprietary interest: none.

**References**


**Figure 2** Fluorescein angiography of the right eye. (A) Preoperative, arterial phase (14 seconds after dye injection). A delayed filling of the cilioretinal artery becomes apparent (white arrow). The macular area supplied by the cilioretinal artery appears hypofluorescent as a result of retinal thickening. (B) 10 weeks postoperatively, arterial phase (14 seconds after dye injection). The filling of the cilioretinal artery occurs at 13 seconds and appears similar to the central retinal artery. There are no signs of non-perfused areas or ischaemia.

**MAILBOX**

**Value based medicine**

In a fine recent editorial, Drs Melissa and Gary Brown raised issues at the nexus of health policy and clinical science.1 As utility assessment is relatively new to the visual sciences, understanding both the assumptions behind this work and the consequences of relaxing those assumptions is essential for the conduct of high quality research and appropriate interpretation of the results.

The use of community elicited utilities (that is, including people without the disease in the elicitation study) in economic evaluation should be given more than minimal consideration. Meta-economic evaluations are intended to inform health policy makers by assessing the value society places on the cure or prevention of disease. Community based utilities typically reflect larger estimates of utility loss than those elicited from patients and result in a more favourable analysis of the cost-effectiveness of preventive interventions than those relying on patient elicited utilities.2 At the same time, estimating community elicited utilities requires the development of easily understood scenarios to assist community members in understanding their potential interactions with the disease,3 after leading investigators prefer to rely on patient elicited utilities. Rather than dismiss the community elicited approach, economic evaluation in ophthalmology would be greatly facilitated by development of a catalogue of community elicited utilities related to old disease developed through the standard gamble or time trade-off methods or responses to health status questionnaires that include algorithms to estimate health utilities.

While the Brown’s caution against the use of functionally based health related quality of life instruments (for example, the NEI-VFO) in economic evaluation, we would like to offer an alternative explanation for this concern. Most disease specific instruments are based in psychometric theory and designed to measure change in the patient’s self reported health status in investigator or investigator defined domains.4 Domain scores do not reflect the importance the respondent assigns to the activities, but scoring algorithms developed by the instrument designer. The result is a metric that is often meaningful to clinicians but does not reflect the value the patient or society places on the health state. This limits generalisability across disease groups, as well as investigators’ ability to comment on the most efficient method to screen for, or treat, an ophthalmic condition affecting multiple areas of physical, mental, or emotional function.

Finally, the standard gamble elicitation method should not be dismissed off handily. More frequent use of the time trade-off reflects the method’s intuitive appeal rather than theoretical superiority. As opposed to the time trade-off in which the anchor event (typically, death, blindness, etc) occurs in the future, in the standard gamble the event is immediate. This provides an estimate of the person’s risk preference unconstrained by time. The time trade-off consistently results in higher estimates of utility loss than the standard gamble,5 potentially resulting in an overestimation of the cost-effectiveness of treatment or prevention.

We hope that our comments will help future work to be pragmatic and theoretically sound. This is necessary if we are to properly characterise the appropriateness of our methods as well as the value of our findings.

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doi: 10.1136/bjo.2004.063784
Accepted for publication 3 December 2004
We thank Drs Kymes and Frick for their interest and comments and look forward to additional awareness in the arena of value based medicine. As increasing numbers of those who allocate healthcare resources become aware of the true cost of a health state (by incorporating quality of life parameters that evidence based primary clinical trials should provide) and the potential use of these resources, it will have a considerably greater role in the delivery of cost effective, quality healthcare. When that takes place, all will benefit.

We respect the authors’ view that there are still many means in terms of minimising any theoretical toxicities of trypan blue. It is our routine to actively remove trypan blue with the bimanual irrigation aspiration system as soon as the anterior capsule has been stained. It is very effective and the potential toxicities may be reduced.

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Cystoid macular oedema with trypan blue use

We read with interest the article by Gouws et al on the apparent increased incidence of CMO in phacoemulsification. We agree that community utility values generally overestimate the degree to which a disease decreases quality of life. In contrast, we and others have noted that community and provider participants asked to evaluate the quality of life associated with a health state using utility value analysis generally underestimate the decrement in quality of life compared to patients with that health state. In essence, patients who have lived with a health state are those best able to ascertain the quality of life associated with that health state. And it is usually worse than others imagine.

In conclusion, we thank Kymes and Frick for their interest and comments and look forward to additional awareness in the arena of value based medicine. As increasing numbers of those who allocate healthcare resources become aware of the true cost of a health state (by incorporating quality of life parameters that evidence based primary clinical trials should provide) and the potential use of these resources, it will have a considerably greater role in the delivery of cost effective, quality healthcare. When that takes place, all will benefit.

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Authors’ reply

We thank Lam et al for their interest. In response to their comments, as stated in the article and demonstrated in figures 1B and C, the effect persists when co-morbidity such as diabetes is removed.

Both groups’ surgery was performed by the same surgeon who did not have juniors attached to the list.

Not all patients had dilated fundus examination postoperatively. Clinically significant cystoid macular oedema (CMO) is unlikely in the very early postoperative phase of 6/12 or better, although subclinical CMO can be demonstrated in up to 20% with fluorescein angiography.19
This retrospective study on a unique cohort of patients provided us with the opportunity to demonstrate a potential side effect with the use of trypan blue. A prospective trial is required to control for all the variables and confirm or refute our findings.

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Accepted for publication 23 February 2005

Reference

BOOK REVIEW

The History of Moorfields Eye Hospital, Volume III

Like John Mortimer’s book of a similar title this third volume of the history of Moorfields Eye Hospital is an affectionate but critical look back at the hospital that has been a major influence in many ophthalmologists’ training and subsequent practice. The volume is written in a positive upbeat style but also describes some of the faults and difficulties that have beset it in the past four decades. In a complex organisation such as a hospital there are inevitable inefficiencies and problems with personalities but the author has wisely stuck to the facts and has plotted the course of the management of the hospital in a very readable way; he has sensibly avoided petty confrontations and offers a lucid outline of the course of Britain’s flagship ophthalmic hospital.

The two previous histories of Moorfields described times past when ophthalmic practice changed only gradually and political upheaval was minor. The current author has been in the unique position of being involved with Moorfields throughout the 40 years he describes. Given the turmoil, both professional and managerial, that has engulfed the delivery of health care during this period he was fortunate that many of the individuals involved with the hospital were available for interview, thus providing first hand accounts of the good and bad times that affected the hospital. The various chapters outline lucidly the clinical and political changes of the time; Moorfields represents in microcosm all the influences to which NHS consultants of all disciplines have been subjected. One special feature of the period described is that it also covers the first 40 years following the foundation of the Institute of Ophthalmology and the not always easy relationship between the hospital and the institute is recorded both openly and tactfully.

The book comprises a number of chapters outlining the various aspects of the hospital’s development—for example, clinical, managerial, financial, etc. The first chapter is an overview involving all aspects of the hospital during the 40 years from 1963 to 2003. It provides a concise synopsis of all the forces bearing on the hospital; not only clinical but also in terms of research, teaching, and political upheaval. Indeed, for those younger ophthalmologists entering the profession at the present time this chapter gives a concise overview of those political influences that have shaped the lives of the NHS and its staff during recent decades.

As the author points out in his preface the subsequent chapters take up the issues raised in the first chapter and analyse them in more detail. If one, therefore, picks up the book and reads it cover to cover there is a strong repetitive element but it was not really the author’s intention that the book should be necessarily read in this way. Each of the later chapters is written in a stand alone fashion dealing with clinical progress, academic development, research, teaching, and finance so that some repetition is inevitable. The major characters in the story of Moorfields development are given due weight; particularly Professor Barrie Jones, under whose influence Moorfields progressed from a rather slow moving organisation to the establishment of all the subspecialist services we know today.

Apart from rather a large number of medical metaphors such as “calm waters,” “stormy seas,” and a few petty errors of detail, such as dates, this volume is a good read, particularly if approached as the author intended. He himself has made major contributions to the standing of Moorfields Eye Hospital and the book is written in the typically clear and polished style, reminiscent of his own scientific contributions.

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CORRECTIONS

In the letter entitled, Norrie disease and peripheral venous insufficiency (Br J Ophthalmol 2004; 88:1475) the ordering of the authors was incorrect. The correct order is Michaelides M, Luthert PJ, Cooling R, Firth H, Moore AT. The journal apologises for this error.

doi: 10.1136/bjo.2005.58032corr1

Owing to an author error the name of one of the authors of the paper entitled, Long term effect on IOP of a stainless steel glaucoma drainage implant (Ex-PRESS) in combined surgery with phacoemulsification, which appeared in the April issue of the journal (Br J Ophthalmol 2005; 89:423–9) was omitted (S Gandolfi). The author list should be C Traverso, F De Feo, A Messas-Kapal, P Denis, S Levartovsky, E Sellem, F Badala, Z Zagorski, A Bron, S Gandolfi, M Belkin. S Gandolfi is at the Clinica Oculistica, University of Parma, Italy.

doi: 10.1136/bjo.2005.42356corr1

NOTICES

Worldwide clinical trials for new technique for early detection of eye disease

A unique new non-invasive technique for high resolution optical imaging of the eye is receiving global acclaim. By combining two high-resolution imaging technologies, the new technique provides doctors with 3-D images of the retina, macula and the optic nerve.

For more information, contact the Media Office on 01227 823581/823100 or email MediaOffice@kent.ac.uk. News releases can also be found at: http://www.kent.ac.uk/news

Trachoma control

The latest issue of Community Eye Health (No 52) discusses new developments in the control of trachoma. For further information please contact: Journal of Community Eye Health, International Resource Centre, International Centre for Eye Health, Department of Infectious Diseases and Tropical Medicine, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Keppel Street, London WC1E 7HT, UK (tel: +44 (0)20 7612 7964; email: Anita.Shahi@lshtm.ac.uk; online edition: www.jceh.co.uk). Annual subscription (4 issues) UK £28/US$45. Free to developing country applicants.

EVER 2005 meeting

This will take place on 5–8 October 2005 in Vilamoura, Portugal. For further details please contact: Christy Lacroix, EVER Secretary, Kapucijnenover 33, B-3000 Leuven, Belgium (tel: +32 (0)16 233 840; fax +32 (0)16 234 097; email:ever@skynet.be).

World Ophthalmology Congress 2006 – Brazil

The World Ophthalmology Congress (which is replacing the International Congress of Ophthalmology) is meeting in February 2006 in Brazil.

For further information on the congress and committees, scientific program and coordinators of different areas are available at the congress website www.ophthalmology2006.com.br

www.bjophthalmol.com