

Sir,  
**Patients attending eye clinic have poor left right discrimination**

Problems with left right discrimination can cause medical errors including investigation or treatment of the wrong eye, which may result in potentially serious consequences.<sup>1</sup> The ability of doctors and medical students to correctly discriminate left and right has already been extensively explored<sup>2</sup> and because of varying ability to discriminate effectively, numerous safety checks exist to prevent errors. Previous studies have also demonstrated differences in ability to discriminate based on educational level<sup>3</sup> and sex.<sup>4</sup> It has not been previously explored whether language preference has any bearing on left right discrimination. It seemed that patients that attended our clinics who could correctly lateralise were less frequent than the quoted rates of between 80.5 and 73.4%.<sup>4,5</sup> We decided to look at the ability of patients attending our outpatient department to discriminate left and right and look for differences between sexes and language used in the consultation, Welsh or English.

Patients attending outpatient ophthalmic clinics in South West Wales were asked to 'look to their right' as part of the routine slit-lamp examination and tallies of correct responses were taken, along with details of sex and language of consultation. The language used was based on that of patient preference. A positive response was defined as the patient either immediately looking to the right, as requested, or looking to the right after some period of hesitation. Of a total of 2309 patients seen, 1417 (61.4%) correctly looked to the right when asked. There was no significant difference ( $P=0.5552$ ) between the sexes in correct left right discrimination, however, 285 out of 390 Welsh-speaking patients looked to the right (73.1%) *vs* 1132 out of 1919 (59%) English-speaking patients, which was statistically significant ( $P=0.0011$ ).

We found that rates of correct left right discrimination among clinic attendees were significantly lower than previously published rates and that the potential for medical errors is thus higher than thought. Our observed variance in ability to lateralise may be due to, among other factors, hearing problems in our population with the more vocally distinct 'Dde' and 'Chwith', for right and left, respectively, in the Welsh language, being more easily understood.

**Conflict of interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

**References**

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Sir,  
**Recent trends in the rate of trabeculectomy in England**

We previously reported a sharp decline in the annual rate of trabeculectomy operations in England: from a peak of 38.7 episodes per 100 000 population in 1995/6 towards a plateau around 11 episodes per 100 000 in 2003/4<sup>1</sup> (where 2003/4 refers to the NHS financial year 1st April 2003 to 31st March 2004). As discussed previously,<sup>1</sup> this was principally due to the introduction of new topical agents with improved control of intraocular pressure, and was accompanied by similar decreases in trabeculectomy rates throughout Britain, Europe, Canada, and the United States of America. Tatham and Sarodia<sup>2</sup> recently described an increase of 149% in the annual number of trabeculectomy operations at Leicester Royal Infirmary, from 71 in 2005 to 177 in 2009, and suggested that the national decline in trabeculectomy may have begun to reverse.

We have used recent data to study trends in the number and rate of hospital episodes of trabeculectomy in England as a whole (Table 1 and Figure 1). Hospital

**Table 1** Annual number of trabeculectomy operations, and annual rate of trabeculectomy operations per 100 000 population, in England from 1989/1990 to 2009/2010

Year	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	
No. of trabeculectomy operations	8682	10 514	12 768	15 054	17 065	17 496	18 676	17 350	14 244	11 859	
Rate of trabeculectomy (episodes/100 000 population)	18.3	22.0	26.7	31.4	35.5	36.3	38.7	35.9	29.4	24.4	
Year	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
No. of trabeculectomy operations	8948	7407	6268	5663	5319	5289	5208	4978	5433	5281	5679
Rate of trabeculectomy (episodes/100 000 population)	18.3	15.1	12.7	11.4	10.7	10.6	10.2	9.8	10.7	10.2	11.0