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Sir,
Peer-reviewed publication of abstracts presented at the Royal College of Ophthalmologists (RCOphth) Annual Congress

Approximately 50% of the abstracts initially presented at scientific meetings will never be published in peer-reviewed journals.¹ Such unpublished research is therefore not available via electronic databases (eg, MEDLINE) to clinicians or to those undertaking systematic literature reviews.

The Cochrane review¹ included 79 studies, only three from ophthalmic meetings, all being from North America in the 1980s. We therefore conducted a PubMed literature search using each author from the abstracts of the 'Final Programme and Abstracts' RCOphth Congress 2004 (search performed 61 months after the congress submission closing date). A publication was deemed to relate to the same work as the abstract if at least one author, methodology, or at least one of the conclusions of the study were the same to allow for subsequent continued recruitment.²

Of the 179 abstracts, 64 (35.8%; 95% CI 29–43%) reached full publication in peer-reviewed journals, most frequently *Eye* (23/64) and *British Journal of Ophthalmology* (18/64). The mean time that elapsed between Congress 2004 and the publication was 20.1 months (95% CI 16.9–23.4 months) (see Figure 1).

Multivariate analysis of the factors influencing publication revealed that the number of authors showed significant positive correlation with subsequent publication rate: abstracts with only one or two authors (26% subsequently published) compared with 36% for 3–5 authors and 50% for 6-or-more authors.

Other factors analysed failed to show any significant difference in subsequent publication rates; posters only

(35% later published)/podium presentations (41%); prospective studies (33%)/retrospective (33.9%); UK only research (35%)/international collaboration (45%); basic-science research (41.7%)/clinical research (36.5%)/service delivery-related studies (26.3%). Publication bias is a well-recognised phenomenon, but research reporting statistically significant (44.4%) and non-significant (43.6%) results were equally likely to be published.

Lead authors based in a teaching hospital or university were more successful (39.5%) in getting papers published than those working in non-academic settings (28.3%).

Nearly two-thirds of the studies presented at the abstract at the RCOphth Congress 2004 had not been published in peer-reviewed journals more than 5 years after the closing date for submission. Studies with larger numbers of authors were more likely to reach publication, possibly because involvement of more authors may mean that there are more people to scrutinise the design and conduct of the research, review drafts, and improve overall quality.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Figure 1 Time elapsed to publication following RCOphth Congress 2004.

Sir,
Response to 'Spontaneous sub-conjunctival haemorrhage in patients using long-term topical corticosteroids'

I read with interest the article by Mercieca *et al*¹ describing a higher incidence of subconjunctival haemorrhage in a cohort of uveitic patients who were on long-term topical steroid therapy compared with a comparison group of patients using glaucoma medication. Although they describe systemic hypertension as a risk factor for subconjunctival haemorrhage, they did