

## **Half eye clinics fail to meet guidance on waiting times**

Fewer than half specialist eye clinics in the UK are meeting national guidelines on treating people with age-related macular degeneration according to a new survey of ophthalmologists.

The survey commissioned by the Macular Interest Group of Vision 2020UK and conducted by the Macular Disease Society, suggests that many patients are waiting too long for both initial as well as follow up treatments of their condition.

Wet age-related macular degeneration can cause significant sight loss within weeks if not treated. Patients need regular injections of a drug into the eye to stop bleeding, leakage of fluid, into the retina, and the subsequent scarring which results in irreversible damage to the central vision.

The Royal College of Ophthalmologists recommends that patients should be treated within two weeks of diagnosis and seen monthly after that for further treatment if necessary.

The survey, published in AMD Awareness Week, suggests that the recommended waiting time for initial treatment is met in only 49.4% of clinics. 41.8% of patients wait from two to four weeks for a first appointment and 8.8% wait more than 8 weeks. In more than 80% of clinics, patients wait more than the recommended four weeks for follow up appointments.

Nearly half the respondents said they were running extra clinics in the evening and at weekends to cope with demand. Even so nearly half respondents said some patients do not receive optimal care with nearly 10% saying that the service they provide is “poor” or “very poor”.

Winfried Amoaku, Chair of the Macular Interest Group said: “This survey suggests that there continues to be a significant lack of resources to deliver adequate contemporary AMD services in the UK.

“Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is now the most common cause of sight loss in the UK. More than half a million people have AMD at different stages, a number which is increasing with the ageing population. Around 40,000 people a year develop the wet form of AMD.

“The new treatment for wet AMD has been a real breakthrough but we need to ensure that patients get access to it. The NHS needs, urgently, to consider how it will meet demand for this treatment. If it doesn’t, patients will lose their sight unnecessarily. It doesn’t make sense to use these treatments less frequently than required, as we know the results will be poor. We can achieve much more for patients with a little more investment in resources. ”

Helen Jackman, Chief Executive of the Macular Disease Society said: “We know eye clinics are working very hard to treat patients in a timely way but they must have the resources to do the job. Losing your central vision to AMD is devastating, all the more so if it is lost when there is a treatment which works.”

Doctors responding to the survey themselves suggested ways to improve care such as engaging more ophthalmologists, using staff other than ophthalmologists to deliver the service, and/or outsourcing care beyond traditional NHS Trusts.

The survey suggests that many more patients are attending eye clinics as new injection treatments for other conditions such as diabetic macular oedema and retinal vein occlusion are effective, and are being made available.

Ends

**Notes to Editors:**

Macular disease causes a loss of central vision. The macula (correct) is the central and most sensitive part of the retina. People with advanced macular disease cannot read, drive or recognise faces. Half of all people in the UK registered as sight impaired or severely sight impaired have macular disease.

The online survey was sent to approximately 600 ophthalmologists. 101 responded, most of them retinal specialists. There are approximately 110 wet AMD clinics in the UK.

The full survey results are available here

[https://www.surveymonkey.com/sr.aspx?sm=2ldxU2xQhlgm1ZZRmuGI\\_2flqRbldKfMGxD6D4gTFDOZU\\_3d](https://www.surveymonkey.com/sr.aspx?sm=2ldxU2xQhlgm1ZZRmuGI_2flqRbldKfMGxD6D4gTFDOZU_3d)

Vision 2020UK is an umbrella charity representing the UK's sight loss sector. It is part of Vision 2020, a global organisation working to eliminate preventable sight loss.

The Macular Disease Society is the specialist UK charity for people affected by macular conditions. From January 2012 it will be known as the Macular Society.

For more information contact [REDACTED], Head, External Relations, Macular Disease Society. [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]