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Misdiagnosis of acute eye diseases by primary health care providers: incidence and implications

Claire L Jackson

TO THE EDITOR: The article by Statham and colleagues raises important issues about the accuracy of diagnosis by primary eye care providers, with all professionals in the study recording a diagnostic accuracy rate of less than 50%.¹ From the general practice perspective, the authors raise a number of important contributors — lack of equipment, ophthalmological expertise and time.

Additional factors, such as undergraduate and postgraduate exposure, and targeted training in the diagnosis of sight-threatening acute eye conditions, are also crucial considerations. From a postgraduate point of view, the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners offers a comprehensive continuing professional development program to support broad-based GP training, including in eye disease.² The Master of Medicine (GP) offered by the University of Queensland also includes a dedicated subject on primary eye care, with particular emphasis on

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sight-threatening presentations.³ The Division of General Practice in which one of the sites in the report by Statham and colleagues¹ sits is currently working with that hospital's Department of Ophthalmology to institute an education/continuing professional development reform program to better target hospital eye referrals from primary care (Shelley Kleinhans, Health Systems Improvement Program Manager, GPpartners [Brisbane North] Division of General Practice, personal communication).

It is very important to describe accurately the dimension of missed diagnosis within primary care — the ensuing challenge is to address it by harnessing the significant momentum within the primary care community for quality improvement.

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1 Statham MO, Sharma A, Pane AR. Misdiagnosis of acute eye diseases by primary health care providers: incidence and complications. *Med J Aust* 2008; 189: 402-404.

2 Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. Products and services; check program. <http://www.racgp.org.au/check> (accessed Dec 2008).

3 UQ Health Insitu [website]. <http://www.healthinsitu.com.au> (accessed Dec 2008). □