Trends in UK contact lens prescribing 2008

In his report of the 13th annual Eurolens Research survey into prescribing habits, Dr Philip Morgan reports on a year in which daily disposable lenses became the most widely prescribed soft lenses, silicone hydrogel prescribing reached a plateau and multi-purpose solution prescribing was at its lowest since 2001.

Our 13th annual survey into UK contact lens prescribing was conducted between January and March 2008.1-12 As in all previous years, we selected 1,000 practitioners (700 optometrists and 300 dispensing opticians) who fit contact lenses at random from the GOC register. Each was sent a questionnaire with reply-paid envelope to provide information about the first 10 patients fitted with contact lenses after receipt. For each contact lens fit, we captured data about the following: date of fitting, new fit or refit, age and sex of patient, lens material, lens design, frequency of replacement, days per week of wear, modality (daily or extended wear) and care system.

Completed questionnaires were received from 98 eye care practitioners (79 contact lens opticians and 19 optometrists); this response is lower than for 2007 but broadly in line with the historical average. All 980 reported fits were given a weighting based on the number of lenses fitted per year by the practitioner (based on the date information on the form) so that fits by practitioners conducting many contact lens fits were afforded a higher weighting than those performing fewer fits. The mean (±SD) age for the contact lens fits reported was 35.1 ± 14.6 years with an age range of three to 82 years. The age for a rigid lens wearer at fitting (mean 43.9 years) is about a decade older than the equivalent soft lens wearer (34.2 years). The ‘two-thirds rule’ for the gender split for contact lens prescribing was again maintained with 63 per cent of lenses prescribed to females.

**Rigid vs soft lens fits**

Soft lenses remain the dominant lens for new fits (96 per cent of fits), although rigid lenses do retain a significant foothold in lens prescribing for refits (17 per cent due to the significant historical wearer base for rigid lenses. Put differently, 86 per cent of rigid lenses are prescribed to an existing contact lens wearer; this parameter is 58 per cent for soft contact lenses.

**Soft lens details**

For new soft lens fits, three types of materials were each prescribed to 32 per cent of wearers – silicone hydrogels, mid water content hydrogels and high water content hydrogels. This suggests that the very rapid rise of silicone hydrogel prescribing seen in 2005 and 2006 has now stabilised. Soft torics continue to be prescribed for about 30 per cent of fits. Multifocals and monovision fits remain relatively low when considered for all lens fits, but when only assessed for those in the presbyopic age group (over 45 years) account for 22 per cent and 17 per cent of fits respectively. Daily disposables were recorded as being the most popular replacement modality for new fits for the first time, with a prescribing rate of 46 per cent compared with 41 per cent for monthly lenses. This highlights the recent popularity of these lenses over the past 12 years (Figure 1).

The use of extended wear lenses remains at similar levels to previous years (7 per cent for new fits and 13 per cent for refits). For these fits, silicone hydrogel materials remain the material of choice for UK practitioners (accounting for 96 per cent of fits).

The proportion of multipurpose products dispensed fell to 75 per cent compared with 92 per cent in 2007. This appears to be a significant shift in the market place and is the lowest value since 2001. The balance of prescribed product was made up by 1-step peroxides. The reason behind the fall in multi-purpose solutions is not directly addressed by this survey, but it may be related to the vibrant discussions held in the past 12 months on the use of contact lens care systems with daily wear silicone hydrogel lenses.

**Rigid lens details**

Ortho-keratology accounts for 1 per cent of all rigid lens fits, suggesting that the popularity of this form of vision correction in the UK lags behind some other markets such as...
the Netherlands and Australia. As in previous years, a high proportion of rigid lenses are torics, suggesting a continuation of the recent trend of rigid lenses being used for ‘special’ rather than standard fitting.

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References

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