Title
Recent trends in the rate of trabeculectomy in England

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Conflict of interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest

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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 in 2002/3-2004/5\(^1\) (where 2004/5 refers to the NHS financial year 1\(^{st}\) April 2004 to 31\(^{st}\) March 2005).

Tatham and Sarodia\(^2\) 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. However, the authors correctly acknowledged that patterns in their unit may not reflect national or international trends. Indeed, many factors may lead to differences between local and national surgical rates, including differences in population demographics, local variation in medical versus surgical choices in glaucoma management, increasing subspecialisation in glaucoma surgery with changing referral patterns, and even the new appointment of a glaucoma surgeon.

We have used recent data to study trends in the number and rate of hospital episodes of trabeculectomy in England as a whole. Hospital episode statistics (HES) datasets were analysed using the operation code C60.1 in OPCS4, recorded in any position on the HES record. Using record linkage, we also analysed the number (and rate) of individual people who underwent trabeculectomy, as explained previously\(^1\); linked data were available for 1998/9-2008/9.

**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.
The annual rate of trabeculectomy has remained stable in England over the past five years. It actually decreased from 10.6 episodes in 2004/5 to 10.2 in 2008/9, then increased slightly to 11.0 in 2009/10. Expressed as numbers, trabeculectomy operations have also remained approximately unchanged over the past five years at around 5300 per year, with a small upturn from 2008/9 to 2009/10.

Little evidence is seen as yet for any notable increase in the rate of patients undergoing trabeculectomy in England. A modest rise in the number of patients requiring surgery might be anticipated owing to demographic shifts towards an older population 3, but again no convincing evidence for a sustained increase in the number of patients undergoing surgery is evident so far.
Ethical Approval

The datasets are anonymised. Approval to analyse them in a programme of research undertaken by the Unit of Health-Care Epidemiology, Oxford University, has been obtained through the NHS Central Office for Research Ethics Committees (reference 04/Q2006/176).
References


Titles and legends to figures

Figure. Hospital admission rates per 100,000 population for trabeculectomy: English national data from 1989/90 to 2008/9 measured as episodes and people per year.