Cost effectiveness of cataract surgery

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Cost effectiveness of cataract surgery

According to the Canadian Community Health Survey, approximately 82% of the population of seniors aged 65–80+ (5 000 000 seniors) reported having vision problems in Canada. Cataracts are the leading cause of vision impairment among seniors. During the period of 1994–2003, proportions of seniors with cataracts rose from 14 to 20% with populations aged 75 and over accounting for higher percentages. 1

Cataract surgery is among non-emergency surgical procedures with highest wait times in Canada. There was a 32% increase in cataract surgeries over 5 years between 1997/1998 and 2002/2003. In British Columbia, there were 11 816 patients waiting for surgery and 7897 patients completed in the 3 months from 31 August 2006 to 31 October 2006. 2 In addition to being a barometer of accessibility to healthcare services, cataract wait times are also a determinant of patient satisfaction, which in turn is correlated with increased health-related quality of life 3 and possibly decreased injury risk. 4

Delay of care is a persistent and undesirable feature of current healthcare systems. 5 Waits and delays plague healthcare systems worldwide, and wait times for most specialists exceed those for primary care practices. 6 From a clinical perspective, delay in necessary treatment due to surgical wait lists is a major concern. 7 Establishing a clinically appropriate time that patients can safely wait for the operation is generally perceived as a method to prevent adverse outcomes of delay. 8

The cost effectiveness of cataract surgery has been well established. 9 In fact, modern techniques used for cataract surgery today result in rapid visual improvement with 50% of patients experiencing good vision by 24 h and 96–99% experiencing good vision by 4 weeks. 10 Evidence supports cataract surgery among older drivers in producing significant improvements in driving performance (best predicted by the concomitant improvement in contrast sensitivity), subsequent crash rates half that of older drivers with cataracts who opted not to have surgery, and self-reported improved visual function and distance estimation. 4

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1. Aisenbrey S, Gelisken F, Szurman P, et al. Surgical treatment of peripapillary choroidal neovascularisation before (A) and 1 year after one treatment/session of photodynamic therapy with Verteporfin (B).

Figure 1 Left eye of a male patient in his early 70s with very exudative peripapillary choroidal neovascularisation before (A) and 1 year after one treatment/session of photodynamic therapy with Verteporfin (B).


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