

By Paul McGinn

Ophthalmologists lead the way in performing day case surgery



Across Europe, ophthalmologists are leading their health systems into the era of day case surgery.

New statistics from the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and

Development show that the day case rate for cataract surgery far surpasses that of the overall rate of day surgery in virtually every European country.

Also, the statistics show that the day case rates for cataract surgery also surpass the day case rates of four operations tracked by the Paris-based government think tank. In virtually every country, the day case rate for cataract surgery surpassed that of inguinal and femoral hernia repairs, ligation and vein-stripping operations, tonsillectomies, and laparoscopic cholecystectomies.

In 2002, the percentage of cataract operations carried out as day case procedures was far higher than the percentage of all operations carried out as day cases in Denmark, Finland, Italy, Portugal, and the United Kingdom.

The overall cataract day surgery rate for those five countries was just under 75% in 2002. By comparison the overall day sur-

Percentage of Cataract Operations Performed as Day Cases – 1992-2002

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Australia							76.8	80.3	84.1	87.1	
Canada							97.8	98.2	98.6		
Denmark					79.6	87.1	88.3	90.8	93.4	95.8	96.5
Finland	4.2	14.7	20.7	33.3	42.4	58.7	67.0	74.7	81.6	86.9	92.0
France	9.8				18.9	22.8	27.4	31.8	35.8		
Ireland			10.9	15.1	20.7	21.1	27.8	28.8	33.3	36.3	
Italy				5.7	9.4	17.7	27.0	37.6	47.1	62.1	
Luxembourg								27.8	29.3	28.0	30.8
Mexico									68.1	68.1	
Netherlands								71.6	82.8	88.9	
New Zealand									89.6	89.2	90.9
Portugal								9.1	30.9	34.7	
Switzerland											52.7
United Kingdom			21.7	33.7	45.7			71.8	77.7	83.1	89.6

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gery rate for all operations in those five countries was just under 40%. Only in Ireland and Luxembourg did cataract surgeons perform a lower percentage of day case surgery than the overall national day case surgery average.

In 2002, the rates of day case cataract surgery rose to as high as 96.5% in Denmark, 92% in Finland, and 89.6% in the UK. By comparison, the overall rates of day case surgery rose only as high as 61.7% in Denmark, 37.45% in Finland, and 53% in the UK.

In some countries, the rate of day case cataract surgery was twice or three times that of the overall national day case average. In Portugal, for example, the rate of day case cataract surgery in 2002 was 34.7% compared to an overall day case surgery rate of 10.4%.

In Finland, the

rate of day case cataract surgery was 92%, compared to an overall day case rate of 37.4%.

In 2002, Italy recorded a day case cataract surgery rate of 62.1% and an overall day case surgery rate of 28.8%.

The OECD figures also showed that cataract surgery is more commonly performed as a day case than are four other operations.

For example, the combined average day case cataract surgery rate for Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and

Switzerland was 62% in 2002.

By contrast, the combined average day case rate for those six countries in 2002 was:

- 8.5% for laparoscopic cholecystectomies;
- 42% for ligation and vein-stripping;
- 33.5% for inguinal and femoral hernia repairs;
- 22% for tonsillectomies.

In general, those European countries with the highest rates of day case cataract surgery were the countries with the highest rates of day surgery for the other four

operations tracked by the OECD. Also, those European countries with the lowest rates of cataract surgery were the countries with the lowest rate of day surgery for inguinal and femoral hernia repairs, ligation and vein-stripping operations, tonsillectomies, and laparoscopic cholecystectomies.

For example, Denmark, which posted Europe's highest rate of day case cataract surgery in 2002, also posted Europe's highest rates of day case surgery for three of the four procedures tracked by the OECD.

Danish surgeons performed 85.8% of their ligation and vein-stripping operations as day cases in 2002. In same year, Danish surgeons also posted Europe's highest day case rate for inguinal and femoral hernia repairs – 78.3%.

In addition, Denmark posted the highest day case rate for laparoscopic cholecystectomies in 2002 – 38.6%. By comparison, Danish ophthalmologists in 2002 performed 96.5% of cataract operations as day cases

Finland, which posted Europe's second-highest rate of day case cataract surgery in 2002, also posted the second-highest rates of day case surgery for laparoscopic cholecystectomies, and inguinal and femoral hernia repairs, and the third highest rate for ligation and vein-stripping.

Percentage of All Operations Performed as Day Cases – 1997-2002

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Australia		35.7	41.9	44.1	43.5	44.4
Canada		51.7	52.7	52.7		
Denmark	53.7	54.7	56.4	57.9	59.3	61.7
Finland	28.7	30.5	33.2	34.6	35.4	37.4
Ireland	41.8	42.4	41.2	40.9	42	44.5
Italy	10.6	14.8	17.3	20.8	24.2	28.8
Luxembourg	40.4	40.6	40.4	39.9	39.5	39.4
Mexico			25.7	20.6	20.5	
Netherlands	41.7	44	45.1	46.3	48	49.5
New Zealand	34.1	35.9	37.4	37.5	37.5	35.6
Portugal			6.4	7	10.4	
United Kingdom		48.4	49.9	51.2	51.5	52

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The UK, which posted Europe's third-highest rate of day case cataract surgery in 2002, also posted the highest day case rate for tonsillectomies – 85.9%. The UK also posted the third-highest rate of day case surgery for inguinal and femoral hernia repairs – 43.8% – and the fourth-highest rate of day case surgery for ligation and vein-stripping – 53.1%.

In that same year, UK ophthalmologists performed 89.6% of cataract operations as day cases.

Although it did not report cataract surgery statistics to the OECD in time to be included in the study for 2002, the Netherlands is expected to remain a leader in day case surgery for cataracts and other conditions. For example, the Netherlands posted Europe's second-highest rate of day case cataract surgery in 2001 – 88% – and Europe's third-highest overall rate of day case operations – 49.5% – in 2002.

Luxembourg and Portugal, which posted comparatively low rates of day case cataract surgery in 2002, also posted some of the lowest rates of day case surgery for inguinal and femoral hernia repairs, ligation and vein-stripping operations, tonsillectomies, and laparoscopic cholecystectomies. For example, the day case rate for laparoscopic cholecystectomies in Portugal and for tonsillectomies in Luxembourg did not even reach 1%.

For more than a decade, Europe's cataract surgeons sprinted toward the elusive finish line of efficiency as they discharged in-patients sooner and performed more day surgery.

If the newest statistics from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development are any indication, ophthalmologists are still striving for the efficiency finish line. However, the OECD's statistics also reveal that sprint to reduce the average length of stay for cataract surgery and increase the percentage of day cases has slowed to a walk and even to a crawl in many European countries.

One reason for the slowdown is obvious in a number of countries. There, the percentage of cataract surgery performed as day cases is nearing 100%. But even in those countries where the percentage of day case cataract surgery is under 50%, the rate of out-patient surgery is slowing. Although it is too early to interpret precisely why the pace has slackened, the OECD figures seem to indicate that cataract surgeons in a number of countries are finding it difficult to increase day case surgery and reduce the length of stay for their patients.

For instance, the country with Europe's shortest length of stay – Finland – actually increased its average length of stay, according to the most recent OECD fig-

PACE OF EFFICIENCY SLOWING AS OPHTHALMOLOGISTS CONSOLIDATE GAINS

Average Length of Stay (in Days) in Hospital for Cataract Operation – 1992-2002

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Australia	2	2.1	2	1.6	1.4	1.5	1.3	1.2	1.3		
Austria	8.9	8.3	7.6	6.8	6.5	5.7	5.2	4.8	4.5	4	
Canada		1.9	1.7	1.6	1.5	1.9	1.5	1.4	1.5		
Czech Republic		7.4	6.2	5.5	5	4.2	3.8	3.7	3.4	3.1	
Denmark	2.5	2.5	2.6	2.5	2.1	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.7	1.5	1.4
Finland	3.6	2.9	2.2	2.4	2.2	1.6	1.3	1.2	1.2	1.1	1.2
France	3.2				2.1	2	1.9	1.8	1.7		
Hungary	13.6	12.7	9.7	8.4	7.3	6.7	5.7	5.2	4.6	3.9	3.6
Ireland	5.2	4.2	3.8	3.6	3.3	3.2	3	2.9	2.6	2.3	2.3
Italy	6.9	6.5	5.9		3.5	3.1	2.8	2.5	2.3	2.1	2.1
Korea						2		1.2			
Luxembourg							2.8	2.5	2.4	2.2	
Mexico						2.2	2	1.9	2	1.7	
New Zealand	2.5	2.1	1.5	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.5	1.8	1.2	1.4	1.7
Norway							2.3	1.9	1.7	1.5	
Portugal	6.3	5.6	5	4.6	4.5	4.1	3.8	3	2.5	1.8	1.6
Slovak Republic	12.8	11.6	10.5	9.7	9	8.4	7.7	6.7	5.7	4.9	4.4
Sweden	2.2	2.1	2.1	2.2	2	2	2	2	1.9	1.8	1.7
Switzerland	6.2	5.7	5.2	4.5					2.8	2.8	2.8
Turkey	7.2	6.6	6.3	5.7	5.1	6.9	4.7	4.4	4	3.8	3.5
United Kingdom	3.3	2.3	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.2	1.2	1.1	1.7	1.1	2.2
United States	1.1	1.3	1	1	1.1	1.1		1		1	

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ures. In 2002, Finland posted an average length of stay of 1.2 days for cataract surgery, thanks to Europe's second highest rate of day cataract surgery – 92%. In 2001, however, Finland recorded a lower average length of stay – of 1.1 days – when ophthalmologists performed 86.9% of cataract operations as day cases.

Finland's experience of an increase in its length of stay for cataract surgery was not unique. Between 2001 and 2002, cataract surgeons in New Zealand also saw an increase. The New Zealand average length of stay actually grew by 0.3 days between 2001 and 2002. Over the same period, the percentage of day case cataract surgery rose to 90.9% from 89.2%.

In the UK, the average length of stay for cataract surgery doubled between 2001 and 2002 to 2.2 days, according to the OECD figures. However, a closer examination of the figures revealed that the 2002 statistics – unlike the 2001 statistics – excluded day cataract surgery cases and cataract surgery performed in a private hospital. Between 2001 and 2002, the percentage of cataract surgery performed as day cases rose significantly in the UK – to 89.6% from 83.1%.

The length of stay for cataract surgery in Ireland, Italy, and Switzerland was stagnant between 2001 and 2002. In both years, Ireland recorded an average length

of stay of 2.3 days; Italy recorded an average length of stay of 2.1 days; and Switzerland recorded an average length of stay of 2.8 days.

Although most countries continued to report reductions in the average length of stay for cataract surgery, those reductions are nowhere near the reductions of the early and mid-1990s. Then, some countries reduced their length of stay by two or three days in a single year. Now, reductions rarely exceed 0.2 days or 0.3 days per year. For instance, the average length of stay for cataract surgery fell by three days – to 9.7 days – between 1993 and 1994 in Hungary. Between 2001 and 2002, the average length of stay fell by 0.3 days to 3.6 days.