Surveys highlight evolving practice patterns

Dermot McGrath in Lisbon

EVER-SMALLER incision sizes, a rise in outpatient cataract practice and the growing popularity of LASIK at the expense of PRK are among some of the more interesting findings of the latest survey of French ophthalmologists conducted by Richard Gold MD, Le Raincy, France.

"The fact that the response numbers were the highest ever received is a positive development and there were also some very interesting findings compared to other years," said Dr Gold, who presented the results of his research at the XXIII Annual Congress of the ESCRS.

Dr Gold noted in particular the decrease in incision size for cataract surgery and the fact that more patients were now opting for outpatient cataract surgery since the reimbursement rules in France were changed for hospital or clinic stays of less than 48 hours duration.

LASIK on the rise in France

For refractive surgery, he highlighted the fact that France is no longer the exception to the rule when it comes to preferring PRK over LASIK for the treatment of myopia.

"This is the first time ever in France that LASIK has overtaken PRK for myopic treatments. We are also witnessing continued growth in the use of Hansatome microkeratomes," said Dr Gold, former Head of the Department of Ophthalmology at the Cognacq-Jay Hospital, Paris and now in private practice at Le Raincy, France.

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As well as providing valuable insights into trends and developments in clinical practice, Dr Gold's questionnaire serves as a useful barometer of the current well-being of French ophthalmology in general.

In the eighth of his annual surveys of French practices in ophthalmic surgery, Dr Gold collected 1,363 responses to an anonymous questionnaire sent to over 5,000 French ophthalmologists. The response rate of 26% was the highest since the survey began in 1998.

The proportion of French ophthalmologists with a low volume of cataract surgery continues to decline, with 10% performing fewer than 100 cataract surgeries per year, down from 22% in 1998 and 15% in 2002.

The proportion performing between 100 and 199 procedures annually decreased slightly to 26%, while the proportion performing 200 to 300 per year remained stable at around 22%. At the high volume end of the spectrum, those treating 500 or more patients annually rose from 12% in 2003 to more than 16% for 2004.

Decreasing incision size

The size of the incisions used by French ophthalmic surgeons for cataract surgery has continued to decrease over the past few years. In 1998, 28% of respondents said they used incisions greater than 4.0 mm compared to less than 2% in 2004, while those using incisions 3.2 mm or smaller took a jump to 55% from 49% in 2003. Almost 9% of respondents said that they habitually used incisions of less than 2.8 mm, double the figure of the previous year.

French surgeons showed a slight preference for temporal incisions (33%), followed by oblique (27%) and 12 o'clock (25%). The proportion of respondents who always use sutures during cataract surgery continues its decline from about two-thirds in 1998 to less than one-third (32%) in 2004, while those who never use sutures increased from 18% in 1998 to 50% in 2004.

Dr Gold reported that the use of injectors for cataract surgery has shown a strong increase in recent years, with 83% of respondents using injectors in 2004 compared to 77% in 2003 and just 21% in 1998. Duovisc continues to be the most popular viscoelastic in France, used by 60% of respondents, with the remainder evenly divided between Ophtalin, Amvisc, Viscoat, Healon and Healon GV.

Ambulatory cataract surgery

Ambulatory cataract surgery is on the rise in France with about 66% of surgeons performing treatments on an outpatient basis. Only 22.35% of respondents kept cataract patients in hospital overnight.

Richard Gold

In terms of anaesthesia, Dr Gold found a slight trend towards greater use of topical anaesthesia, up to 23% for 2004 compared to 17% for the year before. About 45% of respondents used peribulbar anaesthesia, while 17% used topical plus intracameral lidocaine.

The most widely used IOLs are foldable acrylics, with hydrophobic acrylics (66%) slightly more popular than hydrophilic models (61%). The years of Dr Gold's survey charts the steady decline of one-piece PMMA IOLs, down from 57% in 1998 to only 10% in 2004. Silicon implants are also on the wane, from 31% in 1998 to just 8% in 2004.

As with cataract surgery, only a small proportion of respondents performed refractive surgery at a high volume. Only 4% of respondents performed more than 300 refractive procedures per year and about 12% performed 100 to 199 per year. Among the respondents who practise refractive surgery, 97% treated myopia, 85% treated astigmatism and 76% treated hyperopia. Presbyopic treatments are also gaining in popularity, up to 19% in 2004 compared to less than 8% in 2002.

The latest survey also marked an important watershed for French refractive surgery with LASIK (79%) finally outstripping PRK (78%) as the treatment of choice for myopia. LASEK also saw a growing acceptance among French surgeons with almost 19% using this procedure for myopia treatments.

Only a small proportion of respondents used refractive surgery for the treatment of presbyopia, although such procedures continue to be more widely practised than they were seven years ago. As with hyperopia and astigmatism, LASIK is the favoured technique in the treatment of presbyopia and was used by 9% of respondents in 2004, followed by presbyopic lens exchange (6%) as the next most widely used procedure.

The Technolas (47%) and Nidek (29%) lasers continue to dominate the French refractive market. The Hansatome microkeratome has also shown a marked increase in popularity in the last two years and is now favoured by 88% of respondents compared to 27% for the next most popular model, the Moria Carriazo-Barraquer model.

As well as practice trends, Dr Gold's survey also takes an interesting snapshot of the current well-being of the ophthalmic profession in France. One worrying trend is the 'greying' of the ranks of French ophthalmologists: less than 2% of respondents to the survey were under 35 years-of-age (compared to 11% in 1999), 57% were aged between 45 and 54 and 24% between 55 and 64 years.

German refractive survey

In a separate presentation at the ESCRS Congress, Gerd Auffarth MD and his colleagues at the University of Heidelberg analysed the evolving refractive practice trends of German ophthalmologists.

Their survey, highlighting key issues in refractive surgery such as the type of technology used, prices charged and procedure volumes performed, was sent to 267 German refractive surgeons. Within a few days a total of 115 (43.1%) replies were received.

Their more notable findings included the fact that more than 90% of respondents performed LASIK surgery. The most widely used microkeratome was the Hansatome followed by the Amadeus.

The excimer laser most widely used depended on where the procedures were performed. University hospitals preferred the Schwind ESIRIS while private laser centres opted for the Technolas 217/217z (Bausch & Lomb). Intraocular procedures such as phakic IOL implantation and refractive lens exchange were performed by more than 40% of surgeons.

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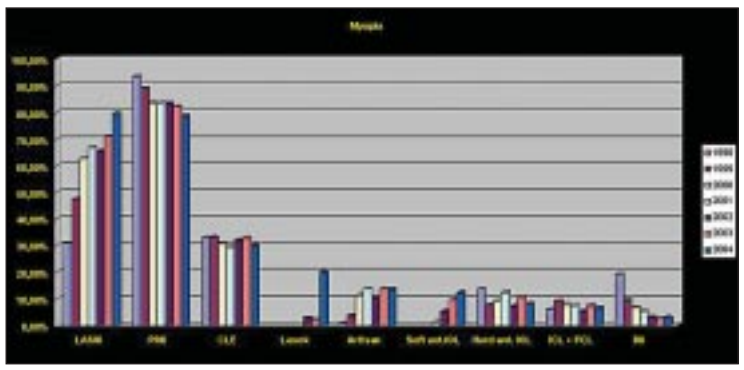

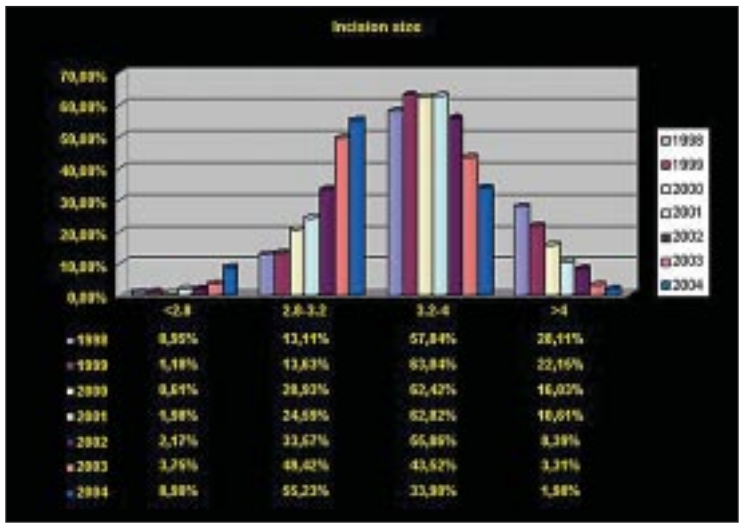

Courtesy of Richard Gold MD