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Developing cataract surgery priority criteria: results from the Western Canada Waiting List Project

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ABSTRACT

Background: The Western Canada Waiting List Project (WCWL) is a federally funded partnership of 19 organizations, including medical associations, health authorities, ministries of health and research organizations, that was created to develop tools to assist in the management of waiting lists. The WCWL cataract surgery panel, one of five panels constituted under this project, developed and tested a set of standardized clinical criteria for prioritizing among patients awaiting cataract surgery.

Methods: The cataract surgery panel was composed of seven academic and community ophthalmologists, two family physicians, an optometrist, a health care services researcher and a health information specialist. The panel met three times between October 1999 and June 2000. The priority criteria were applied to 563 patients in the four western provinces. Regression analysis was used to determine the set of criteria weights that collectively best predicted clinicians' overall ratings of urgency. Interrater and test-retest reliability were assessed, based on clinicians' ratings of videotaped interviews with six hypothetical patients.

Results: The resulting criteria accounted for about one-third of the observed variance in clinicians' ratings of overall clinical urgency ($R^2 = 31.2\%$). The panel modified the original criteria and weights based on empirical results and clinical judgement. Reliability of the revised criteria items was mixed, with the lowest reliability observed for items dealing with glare and social role.

Interpretation: Participating clinicians considered the criteria easy to use and reasonably reflective of expert surgical judgement regarding clinical urgency. Further development and testing of the tool appear warranted.

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