In recent years, diabetes mellitus has become a global health problem. In the United Kingdom the number of patients diagnosed with diabetes exceeded 3 million for the first time in 2014; this is equivalent to 4.6% of the UK population, mainly due to the increase in prevalence of type 2 diabetes.1 In the United Kingdom, only a small proportion of patients have private health care insurance, and about 90% of the population relies on the National Health Service (NHS).2 The NHS is funded by general taxation, so the increase in the number of diabetic persons will inevitably cause a huge financial burden not only on the health system but also on the public sector as a whole, including social services. It is estimated that 10% of the entire NHS budget is spent on the care of people with diabetes, and of this 80% is spent on consequences and complications of the disease.1 This has grave consequences not only for patients themselves but for their families and livelihoods, as diabetic retinopathy is the main cause of blindness in the United Kingdom in people of working age.3

In the past decade in the United Kingdom, there has been a significant leap forward in the prevention of severe vision loss in diabetic retinopathy and maculopathy through the implementation of a national diabetic retinopathy screening program, which has resulted in early detection of disease complications.4 Although devolved separately to the 4 constituent parts of the United Kingdom, namely England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, the screening program largely functions as a United Kingdom-wide scheme.

The UK National Ophthalmology Database Study5 has estimated that clinically significant macular edema (CSME) is present in 13.9% of patients having structured assessments who have been referred to eye departments, with 7.4% having center-involved diabetic macular edema (DME). The proportion of patients with diabetes who had structured assessment recorded increased from 50.7% in 2007 to 86.8% in 2010.

Laser photocoagulation was the cornerstone of treatment in DME for decades; however, center-involved DME was difficult to treat with this modality, and analysis of UK national audit data6 shows that poorer visual outcome is related to worse visual acuity at baseline, diffuse (vs focal) maculopathy, and grid treatment. As a result, there is a significant number of patients losing their vision.

**INTRAVITREAL INJECTIONS FOR DIABETIC MACULAR EDEMA**

The first intravitreal drug widely used for center-involved DME in the United Kingdom was triamcinolone acetonide (IVTA; Kenalog, Bristol-Myers Squibb). Triamcinolone acetonide improves vision through drying up central macula. Due to a high incidence of complications7 including cataract, glaucoma, and uveitis, it is difficult to justify as a treatment in the era of anti-VEGF therapies. Nevertheless, in the absence of alternative options, it has remained in use in a number of ophthalmology departments.

Intravitreal bevacizumab (Avastin, Genentech) has also been in widespread use for DME, and its use has increased following the publication of the BOLT study, which provided good evidence to support the use of bevacizumab in patients with center-involved DME.8 In the United Kingdom, however, the use of bevacizumab in the NHS has been inconsistent, with many hospital commissioning groups concerned about using this drug in an off-label capacity for the treatment of age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and DME. This was further accentuated in 2012 when a cluster of primary care trusts discontinued the policy of funding for bevacizumab as an alternative treatment to ranibizumab.
**SUMMARY**

The NICE approvals of ranibizumab and the fluocinolone implant are significant milestones for NHS patients with DME, both acute and chronic. Although in the case of DME therapy the NICE approval process has been protracted and frustrating for patients and ophthalmologists alike, it remains an admirable means of introducing new, cost-effective therapies to the population of England and Wales, which are free to patients at the point of delivery but paid for by general taxation. How the NHS copes with the increasing demands to fund new therapies in ophthalmology and other specialties, however, remains to be seen.

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Sahar Al-Husainy, MBChB, FRCS(Ed), MRCOphth, is a Consultant Ophthalmologist with the Heart Of England Foundation Trust in Birmingham, UK. Ms. Al-Husainy states that she has received remuneration for travel from Novartis UK, Allergan, and Bayer. She may be reached at Saharalhusainy@hotmail.com.

Jonathan M. Gibson, MB, BS, MD, FRCS(Ed), FRCOphth is a Professor of Ophthalmology in the Department of Vision Science at the University of Aston in Birmingham, UK. Dr. Gibson received remuneration for travel and attendance at advisory boards from Novartis UK, Bayer, Allergan, and Alimera. Aston University has received research funding from Novartis UK.

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