



LETTERS

BURNING ISSUES FOR 2018

My burning issues for 2018: increasing costs and training non-doctors

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As an elderly retired ophthalmologist, my burning issues¹ were emphasised by your short article about the \$1m (£0.7m; €0.8m) once only injection for inherited retinal disease.²

My first issue is the ever increasing cost of healthcare. When will our leaders admit that, in trying to keep us elderly people healthy, the cuckoo has become too big for the nest and that healthcare must be rationed?

My second issue is the startling difference between the medical resources in the developed and developing world. The \$1m treatment doesn't even fully restore the vision of one patient. That same money could fund 20 000 or more cataract extractions with over 90% permanent restoration of vision.

My third issue is more nuanced. The biggest reason for cataract blindness is the dearth of ophthalmologists, who are crowded into the big cities and often work heavily in private practice. Who can blame them when government salaries are so poor and the needs of their families so great? The obvious solution is to train non-doctors to do cataract surgery, and I have had the privilege of doing some of this training. Sadly, the greatest

opposition is from the established ophthalmologists who often see this cadre of surgeon as a threat.

Fortunately, the medical profession seems to be radically rethinking "who does what" in healthcare. In my home city of Leicester, orthopaedic surgeons faced with a long backlog of carpal tunnel surgery decided to train intensively one very capable theatre nurse. As a result, our carpal tunnel surgery service is probably the best and most cost effective in the country. For a single elective operation, excellence is achieved by the dedication of the operator and the quality of the training. Having a person who is not a "fully qualified doctor and surgeon" operating on cataracts could be the best solution.

Competing interests: None declared.

Full response at: <http://www.bmj.com/content/360/bmj.k9/rr-0>.

- 1 Godlee F. What are your burning issues for 2018? *BMJ* 2018;360:k9doi:10.1136/bmj.k9.
- 2 Seven days in medicine: 27 December 2017 to 2 January 2018. *BMJ* 2018;360:j5931.29301742

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