The Vitreoretinal Service

The vitreoretinal service was the first sub-specialist service to be established at Moorfields just over 20 years ago. Prior to that time, each firm took its turn being on call, regardless of the area of expertise of the consultant. Allegedly the stimulus was a particularly annoying Friday evening referral of a failed retinal detachment case to a consultant who was not on call, and who had other plans for the weekend. Today, the VR service, under the capable leadership of Eric Ezra, offers the only continuously available emergency service for retinal surgery in the country, often treating patients from all over the country, particularly at weekends and public holidays.

The medical staff consists of nine consultants, many of whom are members of other specialist services, with Miriam Minihan ably coping with three. We also have five fellows, and five SpRs. We carry out over 3,000 operations each year at City Road and St George’s Hospital and also run clinics on both those sites, as well as at Watford and Croydon. A few years ago we made significant improvements to the provision of emergency services and now have a rapid access emergency clinic every weekday morning, with an operating list in the afternoon.

The service is very active in research, with Jim Bainbridge continuing to do fantastic work in the field of gene therapy and stem cells and Lyndon da Cruz pioneering surgery of retinal implants in retinitis pigmentosa (the ‘bionic eye’). David Charteris carried out an impressive and very informative epidemiological study of retinal detachments and Louisa Wickham is responsible for the largest treatment trial on patients with retinal detachment every published.

The service has a strong teaching tradition and it is no coincidence that Paul Sullivan is also Director of Education for Moorfields. Paul is pioneering new teaching techniques, including 3D modelling, surgical simulators and modern techniques for teaching avoidance of surgical complications.

Many of the consultants are active in the international vitreoretinal arena. Zen Gregor was until recently President of the Club Jules Gonin, the most prestigious retinal society in the world, as well as being President of the SOE. Bill Aylward was President of Euretina, which had its 10th anniversary congress in London last May; a meeting which had over 3000 delegates.

The vitreoretinal specialty is an exciting area, with many scientific and technical advances here, or about to arrive. New small incision systems mean that vitrectomy can now be carried out using instruments as small as 25 gauge (less than 0.5mm in diameter) without the use of sutures, though this is yet to be translated into improved patient outcomes. The introduction of Microplasmin next year could well have a significant impact in reducing the need for surgery in some cases. In one study, 50% of macular holes were closed following a single injection of microplasmin. However, it is likely that VR consultants at Moorfields will be busy in the operating theatre for many years to come!

Bill Aylward FRCS FRCOphth MD
Consultant Vitreoretinal Surgeon