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Diabetic retinopathy in Africa

This issue of *AJDM* contains two articles (one review and one research) relating to diabetic retinopathy in an African setting. This is an important subject, as retinal screening and retinopathy treatment has in the past been neglected. Many older African studies on diabetic complications reported low rates of retinopathy. However, detection systems were often inadequate, and the populations studied frequently had short mean durations of diabetes (reducing the likelihood of retinopathy).

More recently, diabetes outcome (and therefore disease duration) has significantly improved in many parts of Africa, and retinal screening systems have become more accurate. A systemic review published in 2013, revealed overall retinopathy prevalence rates of 30.2 to 31.6%, including proliferative disease 0.9 to 1.3%, and maculopathy 1.2 to 4.5%.¹ The authors concluded that these figures were 'comparable with recent European and American studies'.

Diabetic retinopathy is frequently asymptomatic at its early stages. Proliferative retinopathy and maculopathy are potentially sight-threatening, and yet are highly treatable with laser photocoagulation. Though provision of retinopathy screening and treatment is difficult in resource-limited countries, there are a number of positive and encouraging initiatives in various parts of Africa. The aim must be for all diabetic patients in the continent to have access to these facilities.

Professor Geoff Gill

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Reference

1. Burgess PI, McCormick IJC, Harding SP, et al. Epidemiology of diabetic retinopathy and maculopathy in Africa: a systemic review. *Diabetic Medicine* 2013; 30: 309–412.