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## Minor surgical procedures performed by general practitioners

Sir,

In April 1990, after the advent of the new contract<sup>1</sup> and the minor surgery procedures listed in the new terms of service,<sup>2</sup> I performed a study of the involvement of general practitioners in our health district in minor surgery. Postal questionnaires were sent to 100 practitioners covering all the practices in the Great Yarmouth and Waveney health authority. The questions related to the general practitioners' participation in different surgical procedures, how their experience was obtained, the facilities they had available, the capital outlay resulting from the new contract, the appropriateness of the procedures to general practice, and attitudes to the level of remuneration.

Seventy four doctors responded within one month, and seventy two of these (97%) had applied for inclusion on the minor surgery list. Two had chosen not to apply owing to lack of facilities, and the fact that they did little minor surgery anyway. All responders except one felt that they had adequate 'medical experience and training' to provide minor surgery services. General practice itself was felt by 36% of respondents to be the major route for gaining the necessary skills, 41% cited their house officer posts, and the remainder included outpatients clinics, or experience as medical students or clinical assistants. Two respondents were fellows of the Royal College of Surgeons.

The procedures which the respondents have been performing are shown in Table 1. Respondents were not asked specifically whether they felt able to attempt all procedures listed, as the study was carried out prior to the controversy over what has been called the 'all or none ruling'.<sup>3</sup>

Forty nine of the respondents (68%) would perform a minor surgical procedure when it arose, rather than setting up a specific minor surgery session and 53 (74%) did not ask for written consent because they felt consent was implicit.

**Table 1.** Minor surgical procedures performed by general practitioners.

Procedures	Percentage of GPs who have been performing the procedure (n = 72)
<i>Injections</i>	
Intraarticular	94
Periarticular	96
Varicose veins	10
Haemorrhoids	8
<i>Aspirations</i>	
Joints	93
Cysts	42
Bursae	86
Hydroceles	37
<i>Incisions</i>	
Abscesses	87
Cysts	81
Thrombosed piles	26
<i>Excisions</i>	
Sebaceous cysts	72
Lipomata	68
Skin lesions for histology	81
Intradermal naevi, papillomata etc	81
Warts	28
Ganglions	15
Toenails	60
<i>Curette, cautery and cryo cautery</i>	
Warts and verrucae	65
Other skin lesions	29
<i>Other procedures</i>	
Ligations of varicose veins	1
Removal of foreign bodies	50
Nasal cautery	33

n = total number of respondents.

Nearly all practices had a reasonably varied selection of equipment and four surgeries used local general practitioner hospital facilities when performing minor surgery. Seven respondents (10%) had no clinical light for better illumination, and seven (10%) had no sterilizer, but received sterile instruments on hire from the local hospital. Twelve respondents (17%) had no curette, and 33 (46%) had no

gowns or masks.

Twenty four doctors (33%) felt that the new contract had necessitated a large amount of capital outlay on treatment rooms and equipment. Twenty two doctors (31%) thought they were doing more minor surgery since the changes of the new contract but 34 (47%) felt that the financial remuneration was inadequate. Forty two doctors (58%) thought some of the procedures listed in the new terms of service too dangerous to perform in general practice.

It seems therefore that a considerable number of minor surgery procedures are performed by the general practitioner. Although the commencement of payment is welcomed, it is felt by many to be inadequate. The majority of general practitioners are performing only a selection of the various procedures listed in the new terms of service. Criteria for inclusion on the minor surgery list may therefore be difficult to standardize.

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### References

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2. Department of Health. *Terms of service for doctors in general practice*. London: Department of Health, 1989.
3. Milne R. Minor surgery in general practice. *Br J Gen Pract* 1990; 40: 175-176.

## Changing patterns of drug use and HIV infection

Sir,

The human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) epidemic has resulted in more attention being given to the medical needs of people addicted to prescribed and illegal drugs. Most city general practitioners are now familiar with the approaches of drug users and their requests for help. Previous guidelines