Reply to Visual Disability in Ebola Survivors

Dear Editor,

We thank Steptoe et al for highlighting their research in the ocular health of Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) survivors [1]. We agree that the interpretation and value of subjective experiences can be challenging. Disability is a complex phenomenon that is not always easily amenable to objective biological quantification. The self-reported physical limitations and mental health problems provide an insight into the perception of health by the EVD survivors and remains a valuable tool to assess the quality of life.

In Liberia the lack of correlation between self-reported ophthalmic symptoms and diagnosis of uveitis in EVD survivors further highlights the need for screening and research [2]. Blindness was reported in 38% of EVD survivors with uveitis in this study. We recognize the potential challenges of cataract surgery reported by Steptoe et al, and look forward to seeing further results from the EVICT II study in Sierra Leone, which has reported to date that cataract surgery was safe and effective in EVD survivors, leading to meaningful restoration of vision [3].

The gravity of ocular disease and the need of ophthalmological expertise in the rehabilitation of the survivors in West Africa is now widely reported in the media [4]. We concur that health system strengthening with the integration of survivor care may ensure long-term sustainable rehabilitation, and acknowledge the large unmet need for healthcare in the general population, but EVD survivors remain at greater risk of visual disability, and would benefit from the Ebola survivor specific international funding.

Soushieta Jagadesh
Tom E Fletcher
Stephen Sevalie
Ralf Weigel
Janet T Scott

References

1. Steptoe PJ, Scott JT, Baxter JM, et al. Novel Retinal Lesion in Ebola Survivors, Sierra Leone, 2016. Emerg. Infect. Dis. 2017;23(7):1102-1109.

2. Shantha JG, Crozier I, Hayek BR, et al. Ophthalmic Manifestations and Causes of Vision Impairment in Ebola Virus Disease Survivors in Monrovia, Liberia. Ophthalmology.2017; 124(2):170-7.

3. Shantha JG, Teshome M, Mattia J, et al. Ebola Virus Persistence in Ocular Tissues and Fluids (EVICT) II Study: Cataract Surgery and RT-PCR Outcomes in Ebolavirus Disease Survivors. Invest. Ophthalmol. Vis. Sci. 2017;58(8):3608.

4. Grady D. Ebola's Legacy: Children with cataracts. 2017; Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/19/health/ebola-survivors-cataracts.html? Accessed 20 October 2017.