

What's trending?

A round-up of the eye related hot topics that have been trending on social media over the last few weeks.

#NHS waitingtimes, #NHS privatisation, #NHS postcodelottery

The NHS in crisis seems ever topical, but this time, the focus is on long waiting times "driving people to turn to private treatment" [1], with hips, knees and eyes cited as common reasons for doing so. The NHS 'postcode lottery' describes disparities in waiting times and availability of healthcare services and treatments available in local health services. This comes as a result of rationing of NHS services, a by-product of limited financial resources [2]. Again, hip and knee replacements and cataract surgeries are subject to these pressures [3]. It has been reported that in Luton, patients wait on average 15 days, but in Enfield in London, the mean wait time is 467 days [4]. There is also considerable variation in the rates of cataract surgery carried out. For example, in Scarborough and Ryedale, 1166 operations per 100,000 people are carried out, versus 338 per 100,000 people in Tower Hamlets (London) [4]. The rest of the NHS is not immune, with psychiatric services, dementia, diabetes, learning disabilities, colonoscopies, and orthopaedic operations also affected [2-6].

#StephenHawkingsvs.JeremyHunt

In August, we saw a bizarre spat between Stephen Hawking, world-renowned physicist and Jeremy Hunt, the secretary of state for health. In his speech to the Royal Society of Medicine, Stephen Hawking praised the NHS for not only saving his life, but allowing him to lead the life he wanted and to contribute major scientific advances [7]. As such, he explained that he felt compelled to use his power of influence to speak out and urge the British public to save the NHS [7]. In his speech, he cited a letter he had co-signed previously, addressing the misrepresentation of evidence by Jeremy Hunt to the public about the 'weekend effect', namely that patients died unnecessarily in hospital at weekends because of a poorer quality of care [7]. This spawned a series of countering tweets and statements by Jeremy Hunt in *The Guardian* [8] and *The Telegraph* [9], in which Jeremy Hunt accused Stephen Hawking of spreading the "most pernicious falsehood" and being wrong in his interpretation of the scientific evidence. Cue endless satirical tweets and metaphors about the irony of Jeremy Hunt suggesting that one of the most respected scientists of our time has been unable to critically appraise and represent the scientific evidence.

#TotalSolarEclipse

In August, a total solar eclipse swept across America. Public safety announcements for eye safety were numerous in the run-up to the eclipse [10,11]. Ophthalmologists warned against the risk of developing solar retinopathy [12,13]. Whilst the simple precaution of protecting one's eyes seems to be a no-brainer, the advice was lost on some. The rapper Badmon tweeted he did not watch the eclipse with glasses and he didn't die. Then, the following day tweeted that he had to cancel several upcoming shows due to "unforeseen circumstances". Donald Trump also disregarded all warnings, clearly judging them to be "fake news", and watched the eclipse sans safety glasses [14]. My personal favourite was the report that, following the eclipse, there was a surge in patients presenting to ophthalmologists with pain and irritation in their eyes. We know that the retina lacks pain receptors; hence their symptoms should not be related to solar retinopathy. It turned out that these people had put sunscreen in their eyes, in attempt to provide protection against the sun's ultraviolet rays [15].

#Prince George

In other news, Prince George recently started school. Now, I reckon that we in the 'eye world' missed a publicity trick here. The National Screening Committee (NSC) recommends that children aged four to five have a vision check carried out by the school nurse or orthoptist [16]. This, of course, is to prevent the development of amblyopia. Unfortunately, vision screening no longer occurs in every UK primary school. Therefore, a young child is entitled to a free sight test at a high street optician as part of the NHS service [17]. It has been reported that recent barriers to providing the preschool aged vision screening test as outlined by the NSC's guidelines, is the decommissioning of this service to the local authorities, a lack of clarity in the commissioning responsibility, and a lack of knowledge about the national guidance [18].

#ouralteredlife, #Instagram

And now to conclude with a story highlighting social media in the power to communicate. This once was the scope of a handful of elites but now devolved to the everyday person. Charlie Beswick blogs about her twins, one of which has autism and Goldenhar syndrome [19,20]. Goldenhar syndrome is an umbrella term used to describe congenital craniofacial and vertebral abnormalities. Charlie's son

was born without a left eye, orbital socket, ear, nostril and underdeveloped jaw. She posted a photo on Instagram of her son without his prosthetic eye. The photo was reported to Instagram, and they removed it without an explanation. Charlie took to Twitter, and her tweet (including the original photo) has now been retweeted almost 130K times [21]. The story was covered by *The Metro* [22], and subsequently Instagram issued a public apology [23].

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