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Comfort and satisfaction in contact lens wearers

Dimple Shah examines ways to elicit and monitor symptoms in contact lens wearers and help prevent them from dropping out

Posted by [Sara Wright](#) on 5 November 2014 in [Feature, News & Features](#)

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Lens, patient and lens care factors all have a role to play in contact lens comfort and satisfaction (Rex Features)

We all want our patients to enjoy the best possible experience of contact lenses and to continue in contact lens wear for as long as they wish. The reality is that up to a half of all wearers will discontinue at some stage and the primary reason is contact lens-related discomfort.¹

Across Europe, the dropout rate has been estimated at nearly one in three wearers (30 per cent), with discomfort cited by almost half as the reason (46 per cent).² A recent study in north America found that four in 10 wearers had discontinued and nearly a quarter dropped out permanently (23 per cent).³ Discomfort and dryness were the main causes (44 per cent) and dropout rates were lower in silicone hydrogel lens wearers.

Comfort with soft contact lenses has been the focus for research attention in recent years. Published in October 2013, the Tear Film and Ocular Surface Society (TFOS) International Workshop on Contact Lens Discomfort was the result of 18 months' work by nearly 80 leading experts around the world.⁴ As we

will see, the workshop reached a consensus on many aspects of contact lens discomfort based on current evidence.

Unlike contact lens comfort, few studies to date have examined self-perceived satisfaction with contact lens wear. However, one study found that dissatisfied contact lens wearers had reduced wearing times, either fewer days per week or hours per day, compared with satisfied wearers.⁵ The primary reason for both dissatisfaction and discontinuation was, again, symptoms of discomfort and dryness.

Comfort, wearing time, wearing frequency, and overall satisfaction can therefore be considered as key factors in contact lens success and in continuing wear.

In fact the progression of contact lens discomfort has been described as a continuum, from 'struggling' and physical awareness of the lens, to reduced comfortable wearing time, to reduced total wearing time, followed by temporary discontinuation then permanent dropout.¹

This article will review some of the key findings from the TFOS report and examine ways of eliciting and monitoring symptoms in our contact lens wearers. It will describe how grading comfort and satisfaction in clinical practice can act as a prompt for a more detailed discussion of symptoms. And it will introduce a simple grading tool that can be used to identify strugglers and may ultimately help to keep them in contact lenses.

Signs and symptoms

According to population-based studies, a third to a half of wearers experience discomfort with their contact lenses.⁶ Discomfort is primarily reported according to symptoms as opposed to the observation of signs. While the precise aetiology of contact lens discomfort is yet to be determined, the use of symptoms as outcome measures is appropriate because it relates directly to the patients' experience with their contact lenses.

The TFOS workshop looked in detail at the correlation between signs and symptoms.⁶ These authors observed that the most common clinical signs have been demonstrated to be poorly correlated with discomfort. They concluded that investigating symptoms in soft lens wearers was likely to have more diagnostic value than conducting clinical tests.

Other researchers have argued that a series of tests combining both subjective and objective assessments may be more

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