Reviewer's report

Title: Can Australian general practitioners effectively screen for diabetic retinopathy? - a pilot study

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Reviewer: Dr Mark Gillies

Level of interest: A paper whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Advice on publication: Accept after discretionary revisions

Jackson et al. "Can Australian general practitioners..."

This paper addresses an issue which is of great public health significance. The incidence of blindness from diabetic retinopathy, which is high and rising, would be reduced if current treatments were implemented universally, but not all people with diabetes are adequately screened. The verification that GPs can screen with acceptable sensitivity would assist the planning of improved identification of patients requiring treatment through screening.

The paper is well written

The design of the study is straightforward and appropriate.

A major weakness is the small number of patients used, and the lack of any statistical analysis. Only 4 patients had diabetic retinopathy, while 4 were normal. This allows only 5 categories of sensitivity. The authors presume that the increase in the proportion of GPs who have an acceptable sensitivity is real. This should be subject to statistical analysis, e.g. by contingency table analysis of satisfactory or not, before or after treatment. These weaknesses must be addressed in the discussion.

A precis of the educational program would be helpful, the reference given is unlikely to be available to the international leadership. The extent of the retinopathy is not described. Was it advanced or mild?

Competing interests:

None declared.