

Artificial Intelligence in Cornea, Refractive Surgery, and Cataract: Basic Principles, Clinical Applications, and Future Directions

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Abstract: Corneal diseases, uncorrected refractive errors, and cataract represent the major causes of blindness globally. The number of refractive surgeries, either cornea- or lens-based, is also on the rise as the demand for perfect vision continues to increase. With the recent advancement and potential promises of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies demonstrated in the realm of ophthalmology, particularly retinal diseases and glaucoma, AI researchers and clinicians are now channeling their focus toward the less explored ophthalmic areas related to the anterior segment of the eye. Conditions that rely on anterior segment imaging modalities, including slit-lamp photography, anterior segment optical coherence tomography, corneal tomography, in vivo confocal microscopy and/or optical biometers, are the most commonly explored areas. These include infectious keratitis, keratoconus, corneal grafts, ocular surface pathologies, preoperative screening before refractive surgery, intraocular lens calculation, and automated refraction, among others. In this review, we aimed to provide a comprehensive update on the utilization of AI in anterior segment diseases, with particular emphasis on the recent advancement in the past few years. In addition, we demystify some of the basic principles and terminologies related to AI, particularly machine learning and deep learning, to help improve the understanding, research and clinical implementation of these AI technologies among the ophthalmologists and vision scientists. As we march toward the era of digital health, guidelines such as CONSORT-AI, SPIRIT-AI, and STARD-AI will play crucial roles in guiding and standardizing the conduct and reporting of AI-related trials, ultimately promoting their potential for clinical translation.

Key Words: Artificial intelligence, cataract, deep learning, machine learning, intraocular lens

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Although the potential of artificial intelligence (AI) is still being uncovered, it is proving to be useful in the field of ophthalmology to revolutionize vision care.¹ Although it is unlikely to replace an ophthalmologist's role, it is likely to augment patient care by improving the diagnostic performance and predicting possible outcomes.² Initially developed for retinal disorders and glaucoma,^{3,4} AI has recently been explored in the field of anterior segment diseases.^{1,5–8} As anterior segment diseases often involve some form of imaging, including slit-lamp photography, anterior segment optical coherence tomography (AS-OCT), specular microscopy, corneal tomography/topography, and in vivo confocal microscopy (IVCM), there is a huge potential to leverage the power of AI to enhance the clinical service provision in these fields.

In this review, we aimed to provide a comprehensive update on the utility of AI in anterior segment diseases and surgeries, encompassing cornea, refractive surgery, and cataract, with particular emphasis on the recent advancement in the past few years. We also provide a succinct overview of the basic principles of AI, particularly machine learning (ML) and deep learning (DL), to aid the understanding, research and clinical deployment of AI technologies among the ophthalmologists and vision scientists.

GLOBAL BURDEN OF ANTERIOR SEGMENT DISEASES

The cornea and the lens are the 2 most important refractive structures of the eye. Damage to these structures can potentially result in visual impairment and blindness. According to the World Health Organization, cataract and uncorrected refractive errors are the top 2 leading causes (55%) of blindness worldwide, particularly in the low- and middle-income countries.^{9,10} Currently, the number of cataract surgery performed globally is estimated at around 20 million cases per annum.¹¹ As the proportion of the aging population increases, the global burden of cataract, consequently the demand for cataract surgery, is expected to rise significantly. In addition, the increasing demand for perfect vision after cataract surgery is also growing in view of the improvement in the techniques and technologies (eg, lens and phacoemulsification technologies).^{12–14} Similarly, the socio-economic burden of refractive errors and corneal diseases cannot be ignored. Owing to intensive education and digital learning, prevalence of myopia is estimated to be 80–90% in East and

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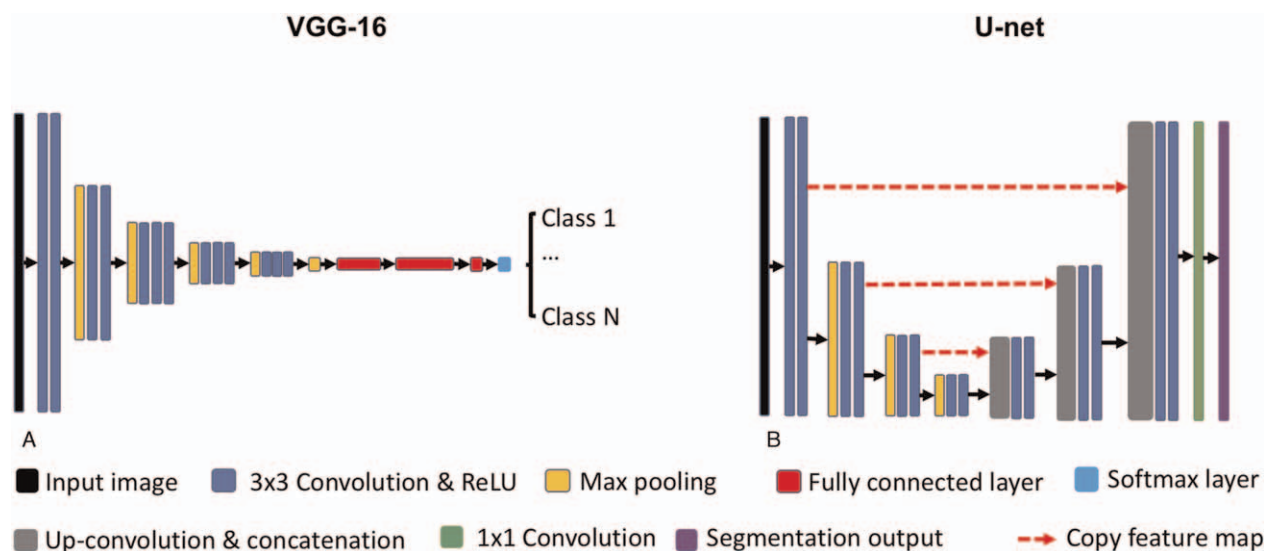


FIGURE 1. Examples of deep convolutional neural networks (CNNs): (A) a classification model using VGG-16 architecture; (B) an image segmentation model using U-net. Both models consist of convolution, rectified linear unit (ReLU), and max pooling operations for feature extraction in a multiresolution manner. For the VGG-16, additional fully connected layers and a softmax layer are used for predicting the class labels based on the learned features. For the U-net, up-convolutional operation is used to up-sample the learned feature maps from the previous layer, followed by a concatenation with the feature maps from the corresponding down-sampling layer. This up-sampling process is also performed in a multiresolution manner. Finally, 1×1 convolution is applied to predict the segmentation output based on the feature maps in the last layer.

components. The generator learns to generate synthetic images from a random vector sampled from a low dimensional Gaussian distribution, whereas the discriminator tries to discriminate the synthetic images from a set of real images. Both the generator and discriminator are trained simultaneously using the minimax optimization strategy in an unsupervised manner.

Model Training

The quality of the training dataset is extremely crucial to the performance of the DL models. In medical applications, the image annotation provided by clinicians normally includes pixel-level annotation or image-level annotation or both. For instance, Figure 2A-B shows a set of paired example images of corneal IVCN and its corresponding manual annotations of nerve fibers, published by Zhang et al.³⁷ It normally requires a large set of paired images (Fig. 2A-B) to train a supervised deep CNN model. When an unseen image (eg, Fig. 2C) is input to the trained model, the nerve fibers can be automatically segmented as shown in Figure 2D. Subsequently, some quantified features such as nerve fibre length, density, and orientation can be measured, together with other clinical information (eg, age, body mass index, etc.), to achieve a disease diagnosis (eg, healthy vs. diseased).³⁸ Alternatively, if the pixel-level nerve fiber annotation is not available, the image-level label (eg, healthy or diseased) can be used to train a deep CNN classification model (eg, VGG model in Fig. 1A) without defining these quantification features. However, these classification models are less capable to be interpreted and have poorer generalizability when only a small dataset is available.

Similar to all other ML methods, several aspects need to be considered when training deep CNN models. Firstly, because of a large number of model parameters and relatively small training examples (especially in medical applications), the model may suffer from overfitting that cannot be generalized well to new test data. Normally a validation dataset is used to determine the training termination point for avoiding model overfitting. Drop-out,³⁹ data augmentation,⁴⁰ and transfer learning⁴¹ have been proposed to

improve the generalizability of a trained model. It is vitally important to evaluate the trained ML model using an independent external test set for assessing the generalizability of the method. A decrease in performance normally occurs when testing on an independent test set, which is mainly due to model overfitting to the training dataset or a data distribution discrepancy between the training and testing datasets. Moreover, most medical applications have a limited number of data that are annotated for training, or only coarse annotations can be provided due to heavy workload and the requirement of highly skilled experts. Many semisupervised and weakly-supervised methods have been proposed to address the issue of limited annotations and inaccurate annotations.^{37,42} Many GAN-based methods⁴³ have also been proposed to synthesize task-specific images for tackling the problem of limited data and distribution discrepancy between training and testing datasets.

Common Terminologies

Some of the common terminologies used in AI studies, including sensitivity, specificity, positive predictive value or precision, negative predictive value, and accuracy, are summarized and explained in Table 1. The sensitivity (Y-axis) and specificity (X-axis) rates are used to plot the receiver operating characteristic (ROC) curve and the area under the ROC curve (AUC) is often used to determine the performance of a given model at all thresholds. Three examples of ROC curve with different AUC are illustrated in Figure 3. An AUC of one may actually be a reflection of overfitting to training data.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN CORNEA

AI has been successfully used in the prediction of diagnosis of various corneal disorders, including IK, keratoconus, pterygium, endothelial diseases, and corneal graft-related complications, among others.^{5,7} An overview of the potential clinical deployment of AI using various imaging modalities is summarized in Table 2.

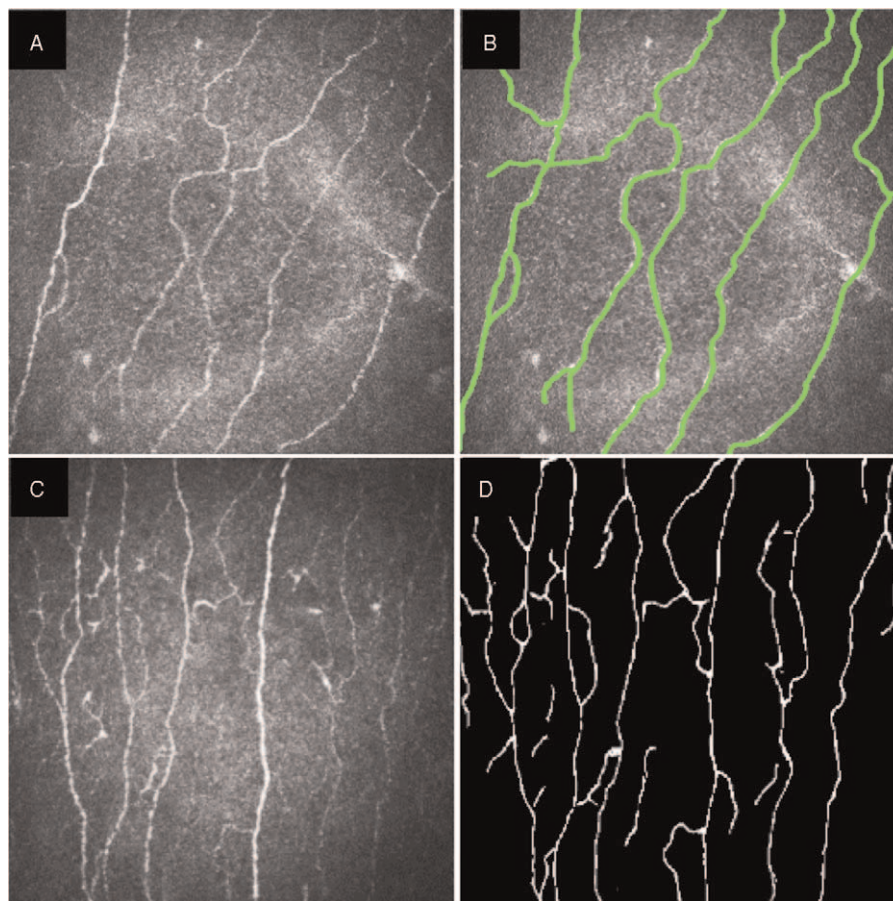


FIGURE 2. Examples of in vivo confocal micrographs of the cornea. These figures were adapted from the study published by Zhang et al.³⁷ A, An example of IVCM demonstrating normal corneal nerves (shown as hyper-reflective structures). B, A corresponding IVCM image of (A) with manually annotated nerve fibres. For supervised model training, it requires a large number of these paired images (A and B). When an unseen IVCM (C) is input to the trained model, the nerve fibres can be automatically segmented as shown in D. IVCM indicates in vivo confocal microscopy.

Infectious Keratitis

One of the clinical challenges associated with IK is the difficulty to establish an accurate diagnosis, due to low culture yield, lack of pathogen-specific features, and occurrence of polymicrobial infection (2%–15%).^{44–46} Slit-lamp photographs are commonly used in clinical settings for documenting and monitoring progress of IK and other ocular surface diseases.^{47,48} In 2003, Saini and associates trained ANN using 40 input variables to correctly classify corneal ulcers into fungal and bacterial categories.⁴⁹ The specificity was 76.5% for bacterial and 100% for fungal ulcers, with an accuracy of 90.7%, which was

significantly better than clinicians’ predictions. Using semiautomated segmentation of epithelial defects and stromal infiltrates visible on slit-lamp photographs, it was possible to reduce variability and maintain accuracy in measuring quantitative parameters in corneal ulcers.⁵⁰ Over the past few years, DL algorithms have been developed to identify fungal hyphae on IVCM images.^{51,52} Apart from differentiating normal from abnormal cornea, AI can also quantify the hyphal density to evaluate the severity of the infection.⁵¹

More recently, Li et al⁵³ have demonstrated the potential of using slit-lamp photographs in accurately diagnosing a range of

TABLE 1. Common Terminologies Used in Artificial Intelligence Studies

Predicted outcome	Actual Outcome		
	Disease	No Disease	
Disease	TP	FP	TP / (TP + FP) PPV or Precision
No disease	FN	TN	(TN) / (TN + FN) NPV
	TP / (TP + FN) Sensitivity	TN / (TN + FP) Specificity	(TP + TN) / (TP+TN+FP+FN) Accuracy

FN indicates false-negative; FP, false-positive; NPV, negative predictive value; PPV, positive predictive value; TN, true negative; TP, true positive.

Definitions

Sensitivity = Actual positive cases predicted correctly by model

Specificity = Actual negative cases predicted correctly by model

PPV = Positively classified cases that were actually positive

NPV = Negatively classified cases that were actually negative

Accuracy = Overall accuracy in predicting both positive and negative cases.

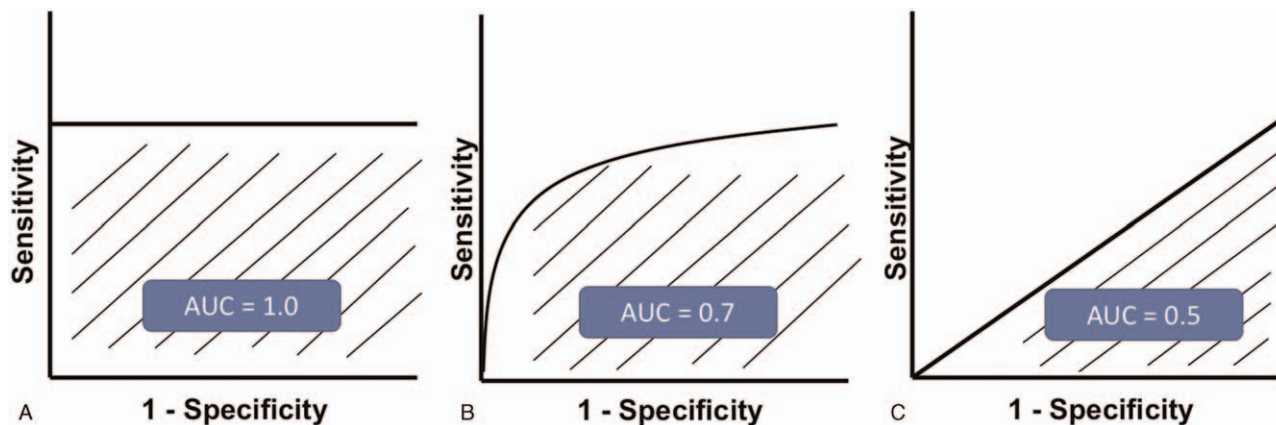


FIGURE 3. Three examples of receiver operating characteristic (ROC) curve are illustrated. (A) A “perfect” classifier with an area under the ROC curve (AUC) of 1.0; (B) A real-world classifier with an AUC ranging 0.5–1.0; and (C) A “poor” classifier with an AUC of 0.5, which is no better than a random guess.

anterior segment diseases, including IK, pterygium and conjunctivitis, and cataract. These images were first annotated by the clinicians using Visionome, which enables dense annotation of the pathological features. Subsequently, the annotated images were combined with DL frameworks using ResNet and faster region-based CNN for the detection and classification of disease, followed by automated recommendation of the further treatment plan (ie, clinical observation vs medical treatment vs surgical treatment).

In addition, a novel DL-based framework was developed to automatically distinguish fungal keratitis from nonfungal keratitis on corneal photographs.⁵⁴ A total of 288 photographs were analyzed retrospectively and the performance of the AI-assisted method was analyzed in comparison to noncornea specialist ophthalmologists and cornea specialists. The average performance had

a sensitivity of 71%, diagnostic accuracy of 70%, and positive predictive value of 60%. The accuracy was found to be superior to the noncornea specialist ophthalmologists but lower than the cornea specialists, making it a useful diagnostic tool in primary healthcare centers. Gu et al⁵⁵ had also developed a DL-based algorithm using ocular surface photographs to differentiate among IK, non-IK, corneal dystrophies, and surface neoplasms. Using a dataset of 510 outpatients, the algorithm was tested against 10 ophthalmologists and was found to have AUC of more than 0.910 for each category. Liu et al⁵⁶ have also recently developed a novel CNN framework for automatic diagnosis of fungal keratitis using IVCN images. Using data augmentation and image fusion, the accuracy of AlexNet and VGGNet based was 99.95% and 99.89% respectively (based on histogram matching fusion).

TABLE 2. Summary of the Potential of Artificial Intelligence for Various Anterior Segment Diseases, Based on Data and Various Imaging Modalities

	Cornea	Refractive Surgery	Cataract
Clinical data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Classification between fungal and bacterial keratitis⁴⁹ - Prediction of the need for keratoplasty in keratoconus⁶⁸ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Suggestion of nomogram for optimizing outcome of refractive surgery^{99–101} - Intraocular lens power calculation^{127–129} 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identifying cases at high risk of developing pediatric cataract¹²⁵ - Prediction of complications after pediatric cataract surgery¹²⁴
SLP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Differentiate between infectious and noninfectious keratitis, corneal dystrophies, and surface neoplasms^{50,55} - Distinguish bacterial and fungal keratitis⁵⁴ 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Grading of cataract^{111,112} - Detection and prediction of PCO^{120,121} - Diagnosing pediatric cataract¹²³
AS-OCT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Detection of localized or mild corneal edema⁷⁴ - Prediction of graft detachment and rebubbling after DMEK⁹⁰ - Diagnosis of graft detachment after DMEK⁸⁹ - Detecting early Fuchs endothelial dystrophy⁷⁵ 		
CT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Detection and grading of keratoconus^{67,69} - Prediction of outcomes of intrastromal ring segments^{66,73} 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preoperative screening of CRS^{94,97} - Identification of corneas with post-CRS and iatrogenic ectasia^{95,96} 	
IVCM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Correlating corneal nerve features to diagnose diabetic neuropathy and assess its severity^{80,82} - Diagnosis of fungal keratitis^{51,52} 		

AS-OCT indicates anterior segment optical coherence tomography; CRS, corneal refractive surgery; CT, corneal tomography/topography; DMEK, descemet membrane endothelial keratoplasty; IVCN, in vivo confocal microscopy; PCO, posterior capsular opacification; SLP, slit-lamp photography.

Keratoconus

AI has also proven to be useful in detecting corneal ectasia such as keratoconus. Early diagnosis and detection of forme fruste keratoconus or suspect keratoconus, especially before refractive surgeries, remains a clinical challenge. They are primarily diagnosed using various imaging modalities, particularly corneal topography, corneal tomography, and AS-OCT. In the past few years, various AI approaches have been explored and proven to be successful. These include feedforward neural network, CNN, support vector machine (SVM) learning, and automated decision-tree classification.^{57–65} AI has been used to predict the outcome of keratoconus management.⁶⁶

More recently, AI-based algorithms using corneal topographies, tomographies, and AS-OCT such as KeratoDetect and Ectasia Status Index (ESI) have been developed to detect early keratoconus and screen patients before refractive surgeries.^{67–69} Most of the algorithms use color-coded tomography maps to detect features of ectasia. Recently, efforts have been made to develop CNN-based algorithms using numeric data matrixes which are more efficient and easier to generalize to all topographers used.⁷⁰ This new algorithm achieved an accuracy of 99.3% in distinguishing among different types of eyes, including the healthy eyes, keratoconic eyes, and those that had undergone corneal refractive surgery previously. On the other hand, Cao et al⁶³ added other clinical measures such as demographic parameters, spherical equivalent, and axial length to the topographic data and compared the performances of 8 different algorithms available. Based on 11 different parameters, they reported random forest method to have the highest AUC (0.97) for detecting subclinical keratoconus. SVM had the highest sensitivity (94%) and k-nearest neighbor model had the highest specificity (94%). It is noteworthy to highlight that corneal topography and tomography represent the current gold standard for diagnosing keratoconus and assessing for the risk of postcorneal refractive surgery ectasia preoperatively; hence they are often used as the “ground truth” for training AI algorithms in these areas. However, early detection of subclinical keratoconus or forme fruste keratoconus remains a diagnostic challenge using this approach.⁷¹ Future studies that include longitudinal data on subclinical keratoconus (to monitor for progression to keratoconus) would be valuable as these data can be utilized to train and develop more accurate AI-based algorithms for distinguishing subclinical keratoconus from normal eyes.

Apart from diagnosis, AI has been recently explored in identifying susceptibility genes for keratoconus. Hosoda et al⁷² used IBM's Watson Drug Delivery to identify keratoconus-susceptibility gene loci from a genome-wide association study on central corneal thickness (CCT). They identified *STON2* rs2371597 as the locus for CCT and confirmed a significant association between *STON2* rs2371597 and development of keratoconus.

ANN has been used to guide implantation of intracorneal ring segments (ICRS) in keratoconic corneas and predict outcomes. Valdés-Mas et al⁶⁶ proposed an ANN-based on MLP to predict the outcomes of ICRS. They assessed vision gain by means of astigmatism and corneal curvature. Fariselli et al⁷³ conducted a comparative analysis of ANN (ANN group) and a group of corneas that received ICRS implants based on the company nomogram (nomogram group). There was a statistically significant difference in the corrected-distance-visual-acuity between the two groups, with the ANN group performing better than the nomogram group. In addition to visual gain, aberration profile was also analyzed and it was

found that the coma-like aberrations decreased significantly in the ANN group. No change in aberrations was noted in the nomogram group. The authors, therefore, suggested use of neural network approach to reduce the higher order aberrations and improve optical quality and visual function. Both the studies used KeraRings as the ICRS implanted. Limited by the number of studies, AI approach needs to be further explored in the use of ICRS using different rings such as INTACS and Ferrara rings.

Corneal Dystrophies and Dysplasia

DL-based algorithms have been used to differentiate normal corneas from edematous corneas based on OCT images.⁷⁴ Eleiwa et al⁷⁵ used AI to detect early-stage Fuchs endothelial corneal dystrophy (FECD, without corneal edema) from late-stage FECD (with corneal edema) based on high-definition OCT images. The model they developed was 99% sensitive and 98% specific in detecting normal cornea from FECD (early or late). The AUC achieved was 0.997 with 91% sensitivity and 97% specificity in detecting early-FECD; and 0.974 with a specificity of 92% and a sensitivity up to 100% in detecting late-stage FECD.

Gu et al⁵⁵ reported an AUC of 0.939 for detecting corneal dystrophy or degeneration using a slit-lamp photograph-based DL model. They included ocular surface disorders such as limbal dermoid, papilloma, pterygium, conjunctival dermolipoma, conjunctival nevus, and conjunctival melanocytic tumors to differentiate ocular surface neoplasms. With the limited existing literature, use of AI in ocular surface neoplasms needs to be explored further. On the other hand, Kessel et al⁷⁶ had trained DL algorithms to detect and analyze amyloid deposition in corneal sections in patients of familial amyloidosis undergoing full-thickness keratoplasty.

Corneal Nerves

There has been an increased clinical interest in the use of IVCN images to analyze sub-basal nerve plexus features and correlate them with ocular and systemic diseases. It is known that manual and semiautomated analysis of the nerve fiber parameters is tedious and time-consuming. Computer vision algorithms have made automated analysis of nerves possible.⁷⁷ However, tracing of the corneal nerves in the presence of dendritic cells and other inflammatory cells, poses a potential problem.^{78,79}

Scarpa et al⁸⁰ used a CNN-based method to find correlation between corneal nerves and diabetic neuropathy. The proposed method analyzed three images from each eye to give a more complex analysis similar to human clinical process without the need of montage creation and acquisition of multiple images, and categorized images into normal and pathological. Oakley et al⁸¹ used IVCN images from macaque models and developed a DL approach for nerve segmentation that achieved a correlation score of 0.80 between readers and CNN. Williams et al⁸² developed a DL-based algorithm to analyze nerve fiber length, branching and tail points, fractal numbers and tortuosity, to diagnose diabetic neuropathy and its severity. In comparison with the ACCmetrics that is an automated nerve analysis software, this DL-based algorithm had superior correlation coefficients than the ACCmetrics for all the nerve parameters measured. Another corneal nerve segmentation network, CNS-Net, was developed by Wei and coworkers, and was found to have an AUC of 0.96.⁸³ Although most algorithms have explored normal nerves with diabetic polyneuropathy, future directions include AI-based analysis of corneal nerves to be applied in conditions like dry eyes, migraine and post-laser-assisted in situ keratomileusis (LASIK) ectasia.^{78,79,84}

Corneal Grafts

Apart from corneal topography, tomography, and AS-OCT, attempts have been made to analyze the specular microscopy images with AI algorithms. Significant work has been done on automated endothelial cell parameter estimation based on specular microscopy. Classic DL techniques worked by segmentation of the entire image. The data thus generated could be used only if the cells were visible in the whole image or by manual selection of the region of interest.^{85–87} Daniel et al⁸⁸ used U-Net in the automated segmentation of specular microscopy images of variable quality and from different ocular diseases. There was a good agreement between the automated image analysis and the manual annotation from the U-Net, with R^2 from Pearson's correlation at 0.96. The authors suggested that U-Net could be used to reliably distinguish the difference between normal and pathological corneal endothelium, and detect nascent immune reactions after keratoplasty. In addition, Treder et al⁸⁹ and Hayashi et al⁹⁰ used a DL approach to automatically detect graft detachments and predict the need for re-bubbling after Descemet membrane endothelial keratoplasty (DMEK), respectively.

More recently, studies have used DL algorithms for fully automated analysis to estimate corneal endothelium parameters from specular microscopy in eyes that have undergone ultrathin Descemet stripping automated endothelial keratoplasty (DSAEK). The DL approach proposed by the authors, automatically segments post-ultrathin DSAEK endothelial images, and computes endothelial cell parameters by detecting cells in trustworthy areas. The use of 3 stages of processing, CNN-Edge, CNN-region of interest, and postprocessing helps reduce potential mistakes from the edges of the image.⁹¹ The method was significantly better than Topcon's automated analysis and similar to the results obtained by manual analysis. The DL-based method provided an estimate for endothelial cell density (ECD), coefficient of variation (CV) and hexagonality (HEX) in 98.4% of the images, as compared to Topcon's software which provided ECD and CV in 71.5% images and HEX in 30.5% images.⁹¹

AI-assisted analysis of data obtained from Scheimpflug imaging has been shown to predict the need for penetrating and lamellar keratoplasty. Recently, Yousefi et al⁶⁸ used a comprehensive profile of corneal shape, thickness, and elevation parameters in cases of keratoconus and corneal edema to predict the likelihood of future keratoplasty. Based on ESI (an index used to classify the severity of keratoconus) and various corneal parameters, the unsupervised ML algorithm was able to predict that around 30% of the eyes with moderate-to-severe keratoconus requiring penetrating keratoplasty or anterior lamellar keratoplasty. However, it is interesting to note that the authors also utilized ESI to predict the need for endothelial keratoplasty. A different study design will be required to evaluate the potential of AI in predicting the need for endothelial keratoplasty using different baseline parameters in the future.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN REFRACTIVE SURGERY

With the increasing demand for optimal visual and refractive outcome and minimal risk of postoperative complications, there has been an increasing amount of AI-related research in the field of refractive surgery, particularly preoperative screening for risk of ectasia after corneal laser refractive surgery, guiding the selection of the type of refractive surgery, and automated refraction.

Post-LASIK Ectasia

Iatrogenic ectasia after refractive surgeries occurs in two scenarios. Either the cornea is susceptible owing to preexisting biomechanical weakening such as in subclinical keratoconus, or when the impact of surgical procedure causes an induced biomechanical weakening in a previously normal cornea.^{92,93} Screening before refractive surgeries is extremely important to identify candidates at high risk of iatrogenic ectasia. Lopes et al introduced the Pentacam Random Forest Index (PRFI), which was a trained ML algorithm of random forest (RF) using data from three different continents.⁹⁴ The PRFI was significantly more sensitive and specific than the Belin-Ambrosio enhanced ectasia total derivation (BAD-D) in detecting keratectasia. When considering ectasias with normal topography, PRFI presented sensitivity of 85.2% and specificity of 96.6%. Using Orbscan II tomography, Saad and Gatinel described a linear discriminant model with a high sensitivity (93%) and specificity (92%) in detecting post-LASIK ectasia.⁹⁵ A recent paper has shown the now named "SCORE" Analyzer to have the highest AUC at 0.911.⁹⁶ Using a larger dataset of 6465 corneal tomographic images, Xie and coworkers developed the Pentacam InceptionResNetV2 Screening System (PIRSS) for refractive surgery.⁹⁷ The authors report a sensitivity of 80% in identifying ectasia suspects, 90% in diagnosing early keratoconus, and an overall diagnostic accuracy of 95% with an AUC of 0.99. In identifying normal cornea, suspected irregular cornea, and keratoconic cornea, PIRSS was more accurate as compared to BAD (93.7% vs 86.2% accuracy). Moreover, the false-positive rate in suspect category was 10% using BAD as compared to 1.7% using PIRSS. Despite the high accuracy, a longitudinal follow-up of the patients to see who actually developed the ectasia and an external validation are required to use the technology effectively.⁹⁸

Nomograms for Prediction of Vision Correction Method

Apart from screening for refractive surgery, AI has been used in recommending the appropriate refractive surgery and the nomograms used. Yoo et al⁹⁹ developed a multiclass ML model and classified patients into laser epithelial keratomileusis, LASIK, small incision lenticule extraction (SMILE), and contraindication groups. Using data from 18,840 subjects, the model was trained to select the laser surgery option appropriate for a candidate willing to undergo refractive surgery with an accuracy of 81% and 78.9% in internal and external validation datasets. Cui et al¹⁰⁰ developed a ML model to suggest a nomogram for SMILE surgery to achieve the desired visual outcome. They reported that 93% eyes in ML group and 83% eyes in the surgeon group had post-operative refractive error within $\pm 0.50D$. The safety and efficacy indices were found to be better in ML group than the surgeon group. Furthermore, Kamiya et al¹⁰¹ developed an ML-based algorithm to predict the postoperative posterior chamber phakic intraocular lens (IOL) vault using preoperative AS-OCT images of patients undergoing phakic IOL implantation, to predict the achieved vault. They observed higher predictability of the vault with their ML algorithm than the manufacturer's nomogram.

Prediction of Subjective Refraction

With the global burden of visual impairment from uncorrected refractive error estimated to be over 150 million, our ability to bypass subjective refraction and prescribe from an automated

system has become an important goal.¹⁰ A new polynomial series, known as LD/HD (Low Degree/High Degree) has challenged the current use of Zernike Polynomials for decomposition of any given wavefront. Previously, DL has been utilized in predicting refractive errors from imaging analysis including fundus images.^{102,103} Zernike Polynomials were previously investigated as a tool for subjective refraction prediction using a dual hidden MLP. ML using LD/HD polynomial decomposition beta-software installed on a wavefront aberrometer allowed accurate prediction of results achieved by subjective refraction, being superior to paraxial matching utilized by Rampat et al previously.¹⁰⁴

Wearable Devices to Monitor Visual Behavior

Internet of Things especially Internet of Medical Things is an expanding field with various wearable hardware designs.⁸ Visual Behavior Monitor (Vivior AG, Zurich, Switzerland) is a novel wearable device used to objectively measure preoperative visual behaviors of the patient so that an appropriate refractive correction intervention plan can be made.¹⁰⁵ The monitor utilized ML algorithms to assess data transmitted to the cloud and analyzed the lifestyle patterns, including lighting used, reading distances, duration of reading, or other tasks. The integration of AI and cloud computing could potentially reduce chair time and allow patients to receive a very personalized treatment plan. Further studies elucidating the potential of AI-integrated cloud computing are required.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN CATARACT AND CATARACT SURGERY

Adult Cataract

In the US alone, a recent analysis showed that even under the most optimistic conditions, the cataract surgical cases backlog due to the COVID-19 pandemic would be greater than one million at 2 years postsuspension of surgery. This was extrapolated in 2020, just before the second and third lockdowns.¹⁰⁶ Over 20 million cataract surgeries were being performed globally per year before the COVID-19 pandemic, but this figure has drastically reduced since. In some European centers, a 97% reduction in surgical volume has been reported in 1 month compared with the corresponding period a year before.¹⁰⁷ Our recent Nottingham study similarly observed a significant increase in the surgical backlog by 400–500% as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, with cataract surgery (53%) forming the main bulk of the workload.¹⁰⁸ The disruption of the health care service had also imposed a negative psychosocial impact on the affected eye patients, particularly those with moderate-to-severe visual impairment.¹⁰⁹ All these issues highlight the need for radical and innovative measures to tackle this unprecedented burden on ophthalmology services.

Recently, there has been an increased interest in the computer-aided analysis of cataract images, using a slit-lamp photograph and/or fundus photography, to enable automated detection and grading.^{110–112} Simultaneous diagnosis of anterior and posterior segment diseases would be preferable. However, such an approach would need to take into consideration the potential confounding factors such as vitreous opacities or a small pupil. Xiong et al¹¹³ explored a new approach to consider blurriness of retinal images as a way to grade cataracts, though vitreous opacities reduced specificity.

In 2019, Zhang et al used fundus imaging technique with a stacked multifeature-based technique to differentiate severity of

cataracts.¹¹⁴ ResNet18 (Residual Network) and Gray level co-occurrence matrix (GLCM) were utilized with two SVM classifiers and a fully connected neural network (FCNN) leading a 6-level grading, demonstrating high accuracy of 92.7%. Subsequently, Zhou et al¹¹⁵ highlighted the problem with DNN, namely overfitting and increased network storage needs. They proposed a method using discrete state transition DNN – with DST-ResNet (residual neural networks with discrete state transition), and EDST-MLP (exponential DST multilayer perceptron) achieving high accuracy in detection and grading of cataract, respectively. Xu and colleagues used a CNN-based model to learn direct features from input data followed by a deconvolution network method to investigate how the cataract was characterized in layers. This forgoes the need for experienced ophthalmologists to label data allowing for a new CNN model.^{114,116} Moreover, AI-assisted telemedicine platforms have been proposed to screen, diagnose, and grade cataracts, potentially serving as a model of care for global eye health.^{116,117}

So far, most AI models in cataract are based upon slit-lamp images and fundus photographs. Optical Quality Analysis System (OQAS, Visionmetrics, Spain), a new imaging technique based on a double-pass aberrometry, has been used to objectively evaluate the quality of vision. It measures several parameters, with Objective Scatter Index (OSI) being the most effective, assisting in preoperative decision making. These parameters could be potentially used as part of a referral algorithm with cloud computing to replace other less objective cataract detection techniques in the community.¹¹⁸

In addition, several studies have also reported the utility of AI in diagnosing posterior capsular opacification (PCO), one of the most common complications after cataract surgery.¹¹⁹ Mohammadi et al¹²⁰ developed an ANN-based algorithm for predicting the risk of significant PCO, with an accuracy of 87%. More recently Jiang et al¹²¹ showed that TempSeq-Net (combination CL algorithm) predicted the progress of PCO at 24 months from slit-lamp images with a high accuracy of 92.2%.

Pediatric Cataract

A pediatric cataract is less uniform than adult cataract and a decision to operate is dependent on the risk of amblyopia, due to deprivation of visual stimuli. Pediatric examination is challenging and attaining consistent high-quality slit-lamp images difficult.¹²² Though few studies have been conducted into pediatric cataracts due to scarcity in resources, they have started to demonstrate the ability of AI algorithms in diagnosing pediatric cataracts.¹²³

Recently, Zhang et al¹²⁴ studied associations related to complications such as severe lens proliferation into the visual axis or raised intraocular pressure. Apriori algorithm used RF and naïve Bayesian (NB) for prediction with datasets which were processed by a synthetic minority oversampling technique (SMOTE) leading to average accuracies of over 91% in solving 3 binary classifications but dropped to 65% when tested on a new dataset. There is an inability to translate information from adult to pediatric cases, though transfer learning or multitask learning could allow adult model adaptation.⁷

Lin et al¹²⁵ recently developed a model to identify those at high risk of congenital cataracts. In this study, 2005 individuals, including 1274 children with congenital cataracts and 731 healthy controls' information was used (nonimaging based) including birth history, family medical history, and other environmental factors. Random forest and adaptive boosting methods were employed, the

addressed before they can be implemented in the real-world clinical settings.^{5,7} Standardization of the imaging techniques and methods for anterior segment is more difficult than of the fundal imaging, primarily due to the variability in the magnification, contrast, angle, and width of the light beam, and the transparent nature of the cornea. All these would need to be taken into account during the standardization process to assure the image quality and usability. Preparing the ground truth with high-quality data, which is annotated and segmented by experts, is time consuming and algorithms with a greater appetite for data such as CNN will need to be replaced by more self- or unsupervised methods. Validation of large data set obtained from heterogeneous cohorts that reflect the real-world setting is necessary, but medico-legal and security of data and set rules must be adhered to.

AI focuses on making connections between input and preferred output. Therefore, it is important to ensure that these AI models targets the relevant factors instead of confounding factors to avoid the problem of “rubbish in, rubbish out”. An ideal input would have a high image resolution, high accuracy of data input (ground truth), least interobserver variability, coupled with new technology including hand-held retinal cameras, slit-lamp adapters, smartphones, and cloud computing to improve the service workflow.

There is also a perception of a “black box” effect where decision processes for giving more weighting to certain parameters or features is not apparent. Some of the hidden behaviors of DL models still require further research. For instance, by editing a few pixels in an image, which is barely noticeable by human, will cause a completely failure for DL models to recognize a well-distinguishable object (known as adversarial attack).¹⁴² A relatively open algorithm with examinable decision steps may justify and reassure clinicians looking to apply these in clinical care of their patients.¹²² There is also a deluge of new acronyms in AI and ever-increasing ways in which AI is used. Standardized nomenclature would augment reproducibility and allow generalizability of a given study to a new and different cohort.

Clinical Implementation and Integration with Big Data and Telemedicine

Many areas of adult and pediatric anterior segment diseases have yet to be explored with AI, with potential for future applications. An automated detection system combined with telemedicine could enable a wider access to the health care services, especially if they match or outperform those of a trained specialist.^{117,116} There is a definite gap at present between useful algorithms and real-world implementation, with a need for focus on translational research. Big data, particularly those derived from electronic health records, serve as valuable untapped resources for facilitating the training and development of robust AI systems as large amount of data are often required.

Before clinical deployment, several barriers need to be considered, including cost, expertise, and regulatory barriers. Though the time and cost currently needed to train and develop these algorithms are high, it is likely to be a necessary investment in preventing a collapsing global health care system in the future. Using multitasking models will also allow for improved cost-to-benefit ratio, where, for example, 2 diagnoses can be made with 1 examination, for example diagnosing cataract and corneal arcus at the same time.¹⁴³

Standardization of the Conduct and Reporting of Artificial Intelligence Research

In addition, there exist considerable variations in the reporting and conduct of studies related to ophthalmic AI research standards.¹⁴⁴ An agreed format in terms of reporting metrics, statistics, and real-world clinical applicability is required. Recently, a number of AI guidelines, including CONSORT-AI, SPIRIT-AI, and STARD-AI, have been developed to ameliorate these issues.^{145–147} These are extensions of previous guidelines which have now been adapted for AI-related studies. SPIRIT-AI guides standard protocol items recommended for interventional trials related to AI whereas CONSORT-AI guides the consolidated standard of reporting trials related to AI. STARD-AI is an AI-specific extension of the standards for reporting diagnostic accuracy studies. These AI guidelines aim to improve the transparency, consistency, and applicability of AI-based research, ultimately enhancing the potential of clinical translation. The apprehension of missed or wrong diagnosis, false reassurances, and medicolegal implications remains. Careful implementation with a safety net system will be warranted to ensure utmost patient safety.

AI, telemedicine, 5G/6G networks, Quantum Communication Networks, and Internet of Medical Things are likely to form part of the new health care revolution.^{8,148} With these digital technologies becoming available at our fingertips, a novel model of ophthalmic care can be developed, helping us to deal with the far-reaching after-effects of the current COVID-19 health crisis.^{8,108,148–151}

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