

Letter to the Editor

Laser surgery in the UK—a consultant survey

Dear Sir,

We would like to bring to the attention of your readership the findings of a national survey about the practice of laser surgery in Otolaryngology in the UK. A questionnaire was sent to all ENT consultants in the UK asking them about the use of lasers in their department and the results presented in *The Royal London Laser Course* in March 1995. Four-hundred and sixty-eight questionnaires were sent of which 285 (61 per cent) were returned. Forty-two per cent of consultants use lasers and the majority (83 per cent) carry out this form of surgery at least once a month. The CO₂ laser is the most commonly used system (81 per cent) followed by the KTP (eight per cent) and Nd-YAG (six per cent). Other laser systems are used in head and neck procedures including HoYAG, Diode, Argon and Combolasers.

Lasers are most commonly used for removal of laryngeal nodules and cysts (83 per cent). Partial cordectomy and surgery for Reinke's oedema is performed by 46 per cent of surgeons. Other procedures carried out by Otolaryngologists but not specifically asked for in the questionnaire include debulking of large supraglottic tumours to avoid tracheostomy (CO₂ laser); treating leukoplakia of the tongue (CO₂ laser) and treating congenital haemorrhagic telangiectasia of the nose (Nd-YAG laser). Two consultants mentioned using the KTP laser in contact mode for functional endoscopic sinus

surgery. A steel endotracheal tube is most commonly employed for administration of anaesthesia and for airway protection (52 per cent). Other methods used include endotracheal tubes wrapped in foil (12 per cent) or wet swabs (18 per cent) and tubeless anaesthesia (six per cent). Of concern is the finding that 12 per cent of Otolaryngologists perform laser surgery with no specific protection against airway fire.

With increasing interest in day-stay surgery and more emphasis on minimally invasive surgery it is likely that more laser surgery will be carried out. In the future expertise may be concentrated in Otolaryngology Laser Units where several laser systems will be available.

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