Learn

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Training Tips:
Goldmann Applanation Tonometry

Most of us who perform Goldmann applanation tonometry (GAT) can remember the day we were trained on the skill. The thought of touching someone’s eye! Yikes! For many of us, this was a stressful time.

Mastering a skill often gives us the responsibility of training others, which can be as stressful as learning. I used to dread tonometry training which, in addition to being a lot of work, meant acting as both coach and cheerleader to the tech in training:

“Can you see the ghost mires?”
“You’re doing great! Keep going!”
“That was pretty good! Let’s get another volunteer and try it again. I know you’ll get it!”

It also meant acting like a mother to the (often bribed) volunteer in the exam chair:

“It will be okay. You won’t feel anything, and I’ll be watching the whole time.”
“It will be okay. It’s barely a scratch.”

Training Tools
Two items that reduced the stress of training GAT for me were a tonometry eye model, and an adapter that holds my smart phone to the ocular of the slit lamp. The tonometry eye model removes the fear of touching someone’s eye, making learning easier. Using the camera attached to the ocular, I am able to see the mires as the technician practices the skill. It is easy to point out if they are too thick or thin, not centered, and when the correct end point is achieved. This method has reduced training time and increased accuracy substantially. The tech gains confidence quickly, and can progress from the model to a “practice patient”.

The camera is still used in order for real time coaching to take place. This makes the recruitment process for “practice patients” much easier, since they know the tech has some experience, and there is an instructor watching everything as it happens. Once the technician has mastered the skill, the camera comes off, GAT is performed though the ocular, and the measurement is double-checked. Advanced skills, such as effective and proper lid holding, are added after the technician is proficient in the basic skill.

Tips to Make Training Less Stressful and More Effective
Standardization. All steps, from administering topical medications, to recording the measurement, should be written down in a checklist format. A formal sign-off process ensures all steps are taught, every time. It gives the opportunity for the trainee to ask questions, and allows both parties to agree that the skill has been learned.

Training should include both didactic knowledge and physical skill, and technicians should have basic slit lamp skills before learning GAT.

While the tech is learning the skill, “practice patients” should be cooperative patients.

Whatever your training method, I hope you find a suggestion or two that helps reduce the anxiety of training Goldmann applanation.