The Utility of Virtual Reality Simulation in Cataract Surgery Training: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

Introduction Cataract surgery is a fundamental intraocular procedure with a steep learning curve. Virtual reality simulation offers opportunity to streamline this aspect of ophthalmic education by exposing trainees to operative techniques in a controlled setting.

Materials and Methods A systematic review of the PubMed database was conducted through December 2019 for English language studies reporting on use of virtual reality simulation in cataract surgery training to assess usefulness. Studies meeting inclusion criteria were examined for pertinent data: study design, number of subjects and live cases, simulator model, training regimen, surgical skills assessed, and overall outcomes.

Results Of the 41 analyzed studies, 15 investigated the impact of virtual reality simulation-based training on performance in live surgery or wet laboratories; 20 used simulation as a device for direct assessment of operative proficiency; 6 explored simulation-based training’s effect on performance in simulated surgery. Thirty-seven studies employed an iteration of the Eyesi simulator, though methodologies varied widely with a few randomized trials available. The literature endorsed validity of simulator-based assessment and benefits of structured training on live complication rates, operative times, and self- and faculty-perceived competency, particularly in novice surgeons.

Discussion The literature surrounding simulation in cataract surgery training is characterized by significant heterogeneity in design. However, most works describe advantages that may outweigh the costs of implementation into training curricula. Collaborative efforts at establishing a structured, proficiency-based cataract surgery curriculum built around virtual reality and wet laboratory simulation have the potential to improve outcomes and enhance future surgical training.
as the Eyesi (VRmagic, Mannheim, Germany), MicroVisTouch (ImmersiveTouch Inc., Chicago, IL), and PhacoVision (Melerit Medical, Linköping, Sweden) are intended to develop surgical technique by using microscopes with stereoscopic imaging and haptic feedback to portray a realistic operative environment. Overall, surgical simulation is an attractive educational modality for its potential to enhance knowledge and skill acquisition and retention without risk to live patients.

In 2014, a review of 10 works on simulation-based cataract surgery training detailed construct validity of simulator modules, subsequent performance in wet laboratories, and association with lower complication rates in one study utilizing a control group. Wider integration of simulation within ophthalmic surgical training has since contributed to an influx of pertinent literature. Our scope comprises over 40 studies, many of which incorporate new methodology or evaluate previously unreviewed hypotheses pertaining to variable intraoperative conditions, curricular satisfaction, or predictiveness of future live operative performance. The aim of this review is to update and more broadly evaluate the utility of virtual reality simulation (VRS) for educating residents to become proficient cataract surgeons, especially in comparison to more traditional teaching methods.

### Materials and Methods

The PubMed computerized database was systematically searched to identify all literature reporting on use of VRS in cataract surgery through the year 2019. Articles were obtained using a search of Medical Subject Headings and keyword terms and their respective combinations (Table 1). Full text English language studies were included in analysis, while review articles, surgical technique guides, case reports, and comments were excluded.

The literature search is outlined in Fig. 1. Initial search of titles yielded a subset of possible articles that were subsequently selected for relevant abstract contents. Full text was reviewed for articles meeting criteria and appropriate studies were retained. The title, abstract, and full-text selection process with assessment of bias at the study level was performed independently by study authors with discrepancies discussed and resolved by mutual agreement.

### Data Extraction and Analysis

Several metrics were obtained from each article to describe study characteristics: level of evidence per Oxford Center for Evidence-Based Medicine (OCEBM) criteria, study design, number and identity of subjects, outcome variables, and overall findings.

### Results

#### Study Characteristics

This systematic review comprised 41 published works: 5 level II studies (12%), 18 level III studies (44%), 17 level IV studies (41%), and 1 level V study (2%) per OCEBM criteria. Six randomized controlled trials (1 nonblinded, 4 single-blinded, 1 double-blinded), 16 cohort studies (7 prospective, 9 retrospective), 16 cross-sectional studies, and 3 case series were included.

### Table 1 Database search for systematic review. Search terms were entered into PubMed search engine to identify English language studies through December 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Database</th>
<th>Search terms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
The Eyesi, MicroVisTouch, and Sensimmer Virtual Phaco Trainer systems were used in 37, 1, and 1 studies, respectively. An additional study used a computer-based simulator developed in-house, and the final study was questionnaire-based and did not specify a requisite model.

The mean number of subjects in each study was 33.6 ± 42.4 (median, 22; range, 3–265; n = 41), the majority of which were ophthalmic residents. However, more experienced surgeons and novice students were also involved, particularly in studies of construct validity that used level of surgical expertise as an independent variable.

Researchers often set out to answer similar questions pertaining to simulation and surgical performance, but with unique and varied approaches in terms of study design (training modules used, outcome variables tracked, etc.). Most often, studies compared real-world and/or simulated performance using differing training methods or baseline experience level. As far as real-world performance was concerned, 11 studies analyzed VRS impact on video-derived scores (Objective Structured Assessment of Cataract Surgical Skill—OSACSS or Global Rating Assessment of Skills in Intraocular Surgery—GRASIS) or operative complications across 24,352 total cases (mean, 2,214; range, 21–17,831).

Temporal Trends
The number of articles meeting inclusion criteria published in any given year varied from 1 (2008, 2009, 2010) to 8 (2013). Figure 2 depicts the count of reviewed articles published by year, stratified by category. The majority of articles was published after 2013.

Methodology
Literature meeting criteria for review examined the use of VRS training in cataract surgery primarily from one of three angles: the first, exploring association with surgical performance in the operating room or wet laboratories (Table 2, n = 15); the second, investigating VRS as an assessment tool for surgical competency (Table 3; n = 21); the third, evaluating effect of VRS training on VRS performance (Table 4; n = 5). Among those approaching the first angle, some studies specifically were designed to investigate the effect of VRS versus other training methodologies (wet laboratories or no training, for example). Others were designed to track performance metrics both at baseline and after VRS training on an individual basis. The remainder provided qualitative data on participants’ attitudes toward VRS and perceived contribution to operating room preparedness. Among studies approaching the second angle, many aimed to establish construct validity of simulator devices. Others assessed the effect of VRS on simulator-scored performance, used it to predict future performance or validate other means of assessment, or investigated questions pertaining to operator or other characteristics as related to simulator-scored performance. Studies approaching the third angle focused on simulator task repetition and improvement, intermodule skills transfer, or nondominant hand use that could not ethically be conducted on live patients.

Impact on Performance in Live Surgeries/Wet Laboratories (Table 2)
Simulation versus Other Training Methodology: Wet Laboratory-Based, No Exposure, etc.
As early as 2009, Feudner et al found prior VRS training to be associated with improved baseline wet laboratory capsulorhexis performance by residents and students. Within 4 years, other groups noted comparable performance between VRS and wet laboratory-trained residents at baseline and improved outcomes compared with those reported in the general cataract surgery literature. Thereafter, a common study methodology involved assessing live surgical performance among resident cohorts in years prior to and after implementing VRS training. Each of the following outcomes was found to be significantly improved in some or all such studies: number of cases performed, operative score as measured by OSACSS or GRASIS, mean/adjusted phacoemulsification time and power, total operative time, trypan blue use, complication rate (posterior capsule rupture [PCR], nucleus fragment dislocation, extracapsular conversion, aphakia, errant continuous curvilinear capsulorhexis, vitreous loss, etc.).

Fig. 2 Article count by year, stratified by category.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author (y)</th>
<th>Design</th>
<th>Level of evidence (OCEBM)</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>n (live cases)</th>
<th>Simulator</th>
<th>Independent variable(s)</th>
<th>Outcome variable(s)</th>
<th>Skills/modules tested</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baxter et al (2013)</td>
<td>CS</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3 residents</td>
<td>903</td>
<td>Eyesi</td>
<td>Sim and wet laboratory training</td>
<td>Case load, complications, survey</td>
<td>Unspecified (~50 h)</td>
<td>Complication rates of ~1% over first 100 live cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belyea et al (2011)</td>
<td>RCS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>42 residents</td>
<td>592</td>
<td>Eyesi</td>
<td>Sim training (&gt;2 h/y)</td>
<td>Phaco time, power, complications</td>
<td>CCC ± phacoemulsification</td>
<td>Reduced phacoemulsification time and power in VRS group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daly et al (2013)</td>
<td>RCT</td>
<td>(single-blinded)</td>
<td>21 residents</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Eyesi</td>
<td>Sim versus wet laboratory training</td>
<td>Video grading, satisfaction questionnaire</td>
<td>CCC</td>
<td>Comparable performance; shorter CCC time and more effective orientation to instruments in wet laboratory group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferris et al (2019)</td>
<td>RCS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>265 residents</td>
<td>178.31</td>
<td>Eyesi</td>
<td>Sim training</td>
<td>PCR rate</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>Reduced PCR rate in VRS group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feudner et al (2009)</td>
<td>RCT</td>
<td>(single-blinded)</td>
<td>21 residents</td>
<td>372</td>
<td>Eyesi</td>
<td>Sim training</td>
<td>Video grading of wet laboratories, perceived usefulness</td>
<td>Forceps, antitermor, CCC</td>
<td>Improved wet laboratory capsulorhexis score in VRS group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kloek et al (2014)</td>
<td>RCS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23 residents, 8 faculty</td>
<td>N/A (372 porcine)</td>
<td>Eyesi</td>
<td>Sim training</td>
<td>Resident comfort, faculty assessment, case load, % case turnover</td>
<td>CCC, hydrotorque, sculpting, quadrant removal</td>
<td>Increased case load, improved comfort with surgical steps and faculty assessment in VRS group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lopez-Beauchamp et al (2019)</td>
<td>RCS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>29 residents</td>
<td>722</td>
<td>Eyesi</td>
<td>Sim training</td>
<td>Operative time, vitreous loss rate</td>
<td>CT-A, CT-B</td>
<td>Reduced operative time in VRS group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucas et al (2019)</td>
<td>RCS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14 residents</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>Eyesi</td>
<td>Sim training</td>
<td>Complications (post capsule rupture, aphakia, nucleus fragment dislocation, extracapsular conversion)</td>
<td>CT-A: CCC, divide and conquer, chopping, I/A, toric IOLs</td>
<td>Reduced total complications over first 10 live cases in VRS group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McCannel et al (2013)</td>
<td>RCS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>48 residents</td>
<td>1037</td>
<td>Eyesi</td>
<td>Sim training</td>
<td>Rate of errant CCC, trypan blue use</td>
<td>33-module CITC: antitermor, navigation, forceps, bimanual, CCC</td>
<td>Reduced errant CCC rate in VRS group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McCannel (2017)</td>
<td>RCS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>38 residents</td>
<td>1037</td>
<td>Eyesi</td>
<td>Sim training</td>
<td>Complications (vitreous loss, retained lens material, errant CCC)</td>
<td>33-module CITC: antitermor, navigation, forceps, bimanual, CCC</td>
<td>Comparable vitreous loss rates overall; increased non-errant CCC associated vitreous loss in VRS group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pokroy et al (2013)</td>
<td>RCS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20 residents</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>Eyesi</td>
<td>Sim training</td>
<td>PCR ± vitreous loss, operative time, attending survey of improved group performance</td>
<td>Unspecified (&gt;40 h)</td>
<td>Reduced % of long cases (&gt;40 minute) among cases 10–50 in VRS group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puri et al (2017)</td>
<td>XS</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>116 residents</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Self-perceived preparedness, competency</td>
<td>Unspecified (onsite availability)</td>
<td>Improved preparedness/competency among residents with supervised wet laboratory or VRS training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comparative Performance before and after Simulation Training

Thomsen et al assessed OSACSS scores before and after VRS training, finding improved performance by novice and intermediate surgeons, but not by expert colleagues.22

Prediction of Future Live Performance

Roohipoor et al found increased simulator score during early residency to be associated with increased future case load, primary surgery volume, and third-year GRASIS scores.23

Qualitative Assessment of Satisfaction and Preparedness

In their survey-based study, Kloek et al noted VRS-trained residents to feel more comfortable with surgical steps and rate as more well-prepared by faculty.24 Daly et al reported that residents deemed VRS and wet laboratory-based curricula to be similarly helpful and realistic, but with different strengths.12 Finally, Puri et al highlighted increased self-perceived competency among residents with access to either VRS or wet laboratory training in a large cohort spanning numerous training programs.25

Simulation as an Assessment Tool (Table 3)

Concurrent and Construct Validity: Simulator Technique and Scoring

Other studies were conducted to establish concurrent and construct validity of VRS equipment and scoring. Most compared computed module performance across first-time operators and found expert/intermediate surgeons to outperform novices.26–33 Banerjee et al found simulator scores to correlate with prior live surgical performance,34 while others described similar associations with additional stratification by experience level.35,36 Meanwhile, Sikder et al endorsed improvement in capsulorhexis scores from baseline after 6 months of residency training.37 Saleh et al noted significant intrasubject variability in simulator task scores during early attempts by novice surgeons.38

Concurrent and Construct Validity: Other Assessment Tools

Balal et al successfully discriminated between live surgical videos of junior and senior surgeons using a motion tracking system correlated with previously validated simulator parameters.39

Other Simulator-Based Assessment

Multiple groups used VRS performance as measured by the simulator itself to quantify the impact of external conditions: fatigue after a day of live operative cases, expressive arithmetic tasks, beta-blocker use, and caffeine intake.40–42 Preference for and safety of various operative approaches such as hand-versus foot-operated forceps and nondominant hand surgery were similarly assessed.43,44 Lastly, VRS performance was compared in context of inherent user characteristics including stereoacuity and Kolb Inventory learning style.45,46
Table 3 Characteristics and findings of studies describing simulation technology as an assessment tool in cataract surgery training (n = 21)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author (y)</th>
<th>Design</th>
<th>Level of evidence (OCEBM)</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>n (live cases)</th>
<th>Simulator</th>
<th>Independent variable(s)</th>
<th>Outcome variable(s)</th>
<th>Skills/modules tested</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balal et al (2019)</td>
<td>XS</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40 residents</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>Eyesi</td>
<td>Surgical experience</td>
<td>Eyesi-based Phaco-Tracking metrics (live surgeries)</td>
<td>CCC, phacoemulsification, I/A</td>
<td>Correlation between experience level and VRS performance (CCC, phacoemulsification, and I/A tasks: path length, number of movements, time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banerjee et al (2012)</td>
<td>XS</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8 residents</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>ImmersiveTouch</td>
<td>Live surgical scores</td>
<td>Sim scores</td>
<td>CCC</td>
<td>Correlation between VRS and live performance (CCC circularity, standard deviation of duration, number of forceps grabs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bozkurt-Öflaz et al (2018)</td>
<td>XS</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16 (7 novice residents, 6 intermediate, 3 faculty)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Eyesi</td>
<td>Surgical experience</td>
<td>Sim scores</td>
<td>Navigation, forceps, bimanual, antitermor, CCC</td>
<td>Correlation between experience level and VRS performance (baseline CCC score, improvement with repetition, nondominant hand CCC, mature cataract CCC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacobsen et al (2019)</td>
<td>XS</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19 surgeons, varying experience</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Eyesi</td>
<td>Live surgical performance (OSACSS)</td>
<td>Sim scores</td>
<td>Navigation, antitermor, forceps, bimanual, CCC, divide and conquer</td>
<td>Correlation between mean OSACSS score and VRS performance (total score)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lam et al (2016)</td>
<td>XS</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16 (10 attendings, 6 residents)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>In-house: PC, sim software, dual haptic devices</td>
<td>Surgical experience</td>
<td>Sim scores</td>
<td>Corneal incision, CCC, phacoemulsification, IOL implantation</td>
<td>Correlation between experience level and VRS performance (total scores, operative time, antitermor, antirupture, CCC, phacoemulsification, IOL implantation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahr and Hodge (2008)</td>
<td>XS</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15 (12 residents, 3 experienced surgeons)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Eyesi</td>
<td>Surgical experience</td>
<td>Sim scores</td>
<td>Forceps, antitermor</td>
<td>Correlation between experience level and VRS performance (forceps, antitermor, operative time, out-of-tolerance %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modi et al (2015)</td>
<td>XS</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30 residents</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Eyesi</td>
<td>Learning style (Kolb Inventory)</td>
<td>Sim scores</td>
<td>Forceps</td>
<td>No association between particular learning style and VRS performance (total score, odometer movement, cornea injury, lens injury, operative time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author(s) (year)</td>
<td>Design</td>
<td>Level of evidence (OCEBM)</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>n (live cases)</td>
<td>Simulator</td>
<td>Independent variable(s)</td>
<td>Outcome variable(s)</td>
<td>Skills/modules tested</td>
<td>Findings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Park et al (2011)</td>
<td>PCS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21 (1 novice, 7 expert surgeons)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Eyesi</td>
<td>Surgical experience +/- distraction</td>
<td>Sim scores</td>
<td>Forceps</td>
<td>No change in VRS performance with distracting cognitive task; reduced rate of distracting cognitive task completion during VRS task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park et al (2012)</td>
<td>PCS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30 residents</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Eyesi</td>
<td>Dominant versus non-dominant hand use</td>
<td>Sim scores</td>
<td>Forceps</td>
<td>Reduced VRS performance with nondominant hand use (total score, operative time, lens injury); intra-user correlation between dominant and nondominant hand VRS performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Podbielski et al (2012)</td>
<td>PCS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18 residents</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Eyesi</td>
<td>Hand vs foot-activated forceps use</td>
<td>Sim scores, subjective preference</td>
<td>Dexterity, CCC</td>
<td>No association between hand versus foot forceps use and VRS performance; no preference for either modality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pointdujour et al (2011)</td>
<td>RCT (Double-blinded)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18 (3 students, 3 optometrists, 6 residents, 6 experienced surgeons)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Eyesi</td>
<td>Placebo versus propranolol versus caffeine</td>
<td>Sim scores</td>
<td>Antitermor, forceps, CCC</td>
<td>Improved VRS performance with beta-blocker use among novice surgeons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privett et al (2010)</td>
<td>XS</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23 (16 students/residents, 7 experienced surgeons)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Eyesi</td>
<td>Surgical experience</td>
<td>Sim scores</td>
<td>CCC</td>
<td>Correlation between experience level and VRS performance (total score, centering, corneal injury, spikes, loss of red reflex, roundness, operative time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saleh et al (2013)</td>
<td>XS</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18 residents</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Eyesi</td>
<td>Attempt number</td>
<td>Sim scores (intra-subject variance)</td>
<td>CCC, cracking and chopping, navigation, bimanual, antitermor</td>
<td>Correlation between intra-novice task scores on first and second or first and third attempt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selvander and Åsman (2011)</td>
<td>XS</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>70 students</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Eyesi</td>
<td>Stereoacuity level</td>
<td>Sim scores</td>
<td>Navigation, forceps, CCC</td>
<td>Correlation between novice stereoacuity and VRS performance (navigation, forceps)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selvander and Åsman (2013)</td>
<td>XS</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>24 (7 surgeons, 17 students)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Eyesi</td>
<td>Surgical experience</td>
<td>Sim scores, OSACSS, OSATS</td>
<td>CCC, hydromaneuvers, divide and conquer, navigation, forceps, cracking and chopping</td>
<td>Correlation between experience level and VRS performance (overall scores, OSATS, OSACSS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author(s) (y)</td>
<td>Design</td>
<td>Level of evidence (OCEBM)</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Simulator</td>
<td>n (live cases)</td>
<td>Independent variable(s)</td>
<td>Outcome variable(s)</td>
<td>Skills/modules tested</td>
<td>Findings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Selvander and Åsman (2013)</td>
<td>XS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>XS</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>24 (7 surgeons, 17 students)</td>
<td>Eyesi</td>
<td>Surgical experience</td>
<td>Sim scores, OSACSS, OSATS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikder et al (2015)</td>
<td>PCS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>PCS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>40 residents</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>MicroVisTouch</td>
<td>Interim surgical experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiteri et al (2014)</td>
<td>XS</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>XS</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30 residents, varying experience</td>
<td>Eyesi</td>
<td>Surgical experience</td>
<td>Sim scores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomsen et al (2015)</td>
<td>XS</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>XS</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>42 (26 novice residents, 11 experienced cataract surgeons, 5 experienced vitrectomy surgeons)</td>
<td>Eyesi</td>
<td>Surgical experience</td>
<td>Sim scores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomsen et al (2017)</td>
<td>XS</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>XS</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>42 (36 novice residents, 11 experienced cataract surgeons, 5 experienced vitrectomy surgeons)</td>
<td>Eyesi</td>
<td>Surgical experience</td>
<td>Sim scores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waqar et al (2011)</td>
<td>PCS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>PCS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7 experienced surgeons</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Eyesi</td>
<td>Live surgical performance (motion-tracking score)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Abbreviations: CCC, [continuous curvilinear] capsulorhexis; CS, case series; IOL, intraocular lens; OSACSS, objective structured assessment of cataract surgical skill; OSATS, objective structured assessment of technical surgical skills; PCS/RCS, prospective/retrospective cohort study; RCT, randomized controlled trial; XS, cross-sectional study.

Table 3 (Continued)
Effect of Simulator-Based Training on Simulator-Based Performance

Finally, other studies described significant improvement in VRS performance of trainees after varying extents of VRS training. Gonzalez-Gonzalez et al stratiﬁed by experience level and dominant/nondominant hand use during VRS capsulorhexis, noting steepest improvement in the nondominant hand/novice subgroup. Selvander and Åsman observed limited skill transfer between capsulorhexis and navigation modules among students, whereas Thomsen et al described similar ﬁndings between prior VRS cataract surgery and vitreoretinal modules (Table 4).51

Discussion

Limitations

The predominant limitations of this review include study heterogeneity and small sample size. Protocols ranged from merely providing trainees with VRS access to mandating completion of more rigorous module sequences in the accompanying Eyesi curriculum (Table 9). Outcome variables of interest also varied. Studies assessing VRS as a training modality measured outcomes of live surgeries and/or wet laboratories objectively (case load, complication rates, phacoemulsification/total operative time, phacoemulsification power) and subjectively (qualitative trainer/trainee surveys, video grading, OSACCS score, need for additional help). Similarly, those assessing VRS as a proﬁciency assessment tool relied predominantly on simulator-based and other scoring metrics, both objective (path length, number of movements, time, circularity, number of forceps grabs) and subjective (post-training satisfaction survey, OSACCS score). Certainly, studies associating VRS training with larger operative caseload later in residency hint at a potential confounder for improved performance in virtual and live environments.

The vast majority of reviewed studies (37) used the Eyesi as opposed to other devices (ImmersiveTouch, MicroVisTouch, or other in-house models). This reduces the generalizability of our conclusions to all simulators, which may boast different strengths. However, at present, over 70% of accredited residency programs possess at least one Eyesi; with 109 Eyesi simulators active at US accredited residency and fellowship programs, federal government-appointed centers, and nongovernmental organizations, it is the most commonly used VRS device used by current-day prospective ophthalmologists trained in the US (Marshall Dial, e-mail communication, January 2020).

VRS training and evaluation in the analyzed studies placed greater emphasis on intraocular maneuvers as opposed to periocular manipulation at the conjunctiva, sclera, and cornea. By our literature search, these speciﬁc skills were not practiced or assessed in training modules, but are emphasized in newer virtual environments like the HelpMeSee simulator, which is used for manual small incision cataract surgery (MSICS) training. Translation of skills required for MSICS remains unstudied with respect to resident performance in other ophthalmic procedures.52

Lastly, our search was limited to literature for which English full text was available in the PubMed database. Few studies were qualiﬁed as randomized controlled trials with a high level of evidence as per OCEBM criteria. Unpublished literature was not included, therefore eliciting concern for inﬂuence of a publication bias.

Validity and Implications

The concept of validity is particularly important in the medical education literature. Gallagher et al deﬁned various subtypes important in the context of surgical education and performance evaluation. Concurrent validity is based on whether the test produces similar results to another purporting to measure the same, whereas construct validity is in part based on whether a test will measure what is intended based on ability to differentiate experts from novices.

We found strong evidence for the concurrent and construct validity of Eyesi-based cataract surgery proﬁciency assessment. Simulator scores were correlated with OSACCS and other systems used during live cases, and VRS-naive experienced surgeons universally outperformed VRS-naive junior trainee counterparts. Novice surgeon status and nondominant hand use were associated with more dramatic early increases in module scores. This intuitively makes sense as initial scores were generally lower under these conditions and thus allowed “more room for improvement” before a ceiling effect was observed. We presume that VRS training may be more beneﬁcial to skill development if undertaken earlier in one’s career.

Negative Findings

Nonetheless, even studies providing compelling evidence for VRS training yielded varying degrees of improvement across discrete surgical maneuvers and outcomes. For example, Daly et al reported shorter capsulorhexis time after wet laboratory training. Selvander and Åsman discussed that OSACCS scoring more effectively discriminated between surgical novices and experts in simulated phacoemulsification tasks. Puri et al did not deem VRS availability to be beneﬁcial to residents’ perceived preparedness for live hydrodissection and sculpting, nor did surveyed residents endorse signiﬁcantly reduced perceived difﬁculty of surgical steps after simulator use. Rather, they found the element of faculty supervision, discussion, and feedback to be most integral to development of proper techniques and comfort level.

Practical Application: Cost Consideration and Alternatives

Arguably, the most instructive quality of this review is in informing whether training programs should invest in VRS technology to reap its potential beneﬁts, both in a vacuum and in comparison with other training modalities.

A common counter-argument is based on required expense: of the simulator device and its maintenance, of a physical training space, of faculty instruction time and diversion from other educational activities in a residency curriculum. However, Spiteri et al noted that reductions in the live operative learning curve may actually reduce the cost of training each.
Table 4 Characteristics and findings of studies describing the impact of simulated cataract surgery module training on operative performance as assessed by simulation technology (n = 5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author (y)</th>
<th>Design</th>
<th>Level of evidence (OCEBM)</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>n (live cases)</th>
<th>Simulator</th>
<th>Independent variable(s)</th>
<th>Outcome variable(s)</th>
<th>Skills/modules tested</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bergqvist et al (2014)</td>
<td>RCT (nonblinded)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20 students, 2 surgeons</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Eyesi</td>
<td>Sim training (varying)</td>
<td>Sim scores</td>
<td>CCC, hydromaneuver, divide and conquer</td>
<td>Correlation between extent of VRS training and VRS performance (overall score, capsule rupture/damage)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>González-González et al (2016)</td>
<td>PCS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14 (3 attendings, 11 residents)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Eyesi</td>
<td>Sim training (pre versus post), dominant versus non-dominant hand usage, surgical experience</td>
<td>Sim scores, satisfaction questionnaire</td>
<td>CCC</td>
<td>Improved VRS performance (overall score, average radius, maximum radial extension, oedometer, operative time) from baseline with dominant/non-dominant hand use; reduced VRS performance with non-dominant hand use at baseline with steeper rate of subsequent improvement; no significant differences noted between trainees and attendings on satisfaction questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saleh et al (2013)</td>
<td>PCS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16 residents</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Eyesi</td>
<td>Sim training (pre versus post)</td>
<td>Sim scores</td>
<td>Navigation, antiterror, CCC, cracking and chopping</td>
<td>Improved VRS performance (total scores) from baseline after completion of VRS training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selvander and Åsman (2012)</td>
<td>RCT (single-blinded)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>35 students</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Eyesi</td>
<td>Sim training (capsulorhexis versus navigation-centric), user stereoaucity</td>
<td>Sim scores, OSACSS, OSATS</td>
<td>Navigation, CCC</td>
<td>Improved VRS performance and plateau with repetition (navigation score, CCC score, operative time, corneal damage); correlation between VRS performance (CCS score) and OSACSS; no significant skill transfer between navigation and CCC modules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomsen et al (2017)</td>
<td>RCT (single-blinded)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12 residents, 3 attendings</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Eyesi</td>
<td>Sim training (cataract)</td>
<td>Sim scores (vitreoretinal)</td>
<td>Navigation, forceps, vitrector, antiterror, bimanual, bimanual scissors, laser coagulation, posterior hyaloid, epiretinal membrane, internal limiting membrane peel, retinal detachment</td>
<td>Correlation between experience level and VRS performance on vitreoretinal modules; no association between VRS cataract pre-training and VRS performance on vitreoretinal modules</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Abbreviations: CCC, [continuous curvilinear] capsulorhexis; CS, case series; OSACSS, objective structured assessment of cataract surgical skill; OSATS, objective structured assessment of technical surgical skills; PCS/RCS, prospective/retrospective cohort study; RCT, randomized controlled trial; XS, cross-sectional study.
Table 5: Eyesi cataract curriculum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CAT-A introductory courses</th>
<th>CAT-B beginners’ courses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anterior chamber navigation</td>
<td>Navigation and instruments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intracapsular navigation</td>
<td>Capsulorhexis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bimanual navigation</td>
<td>Intracapsular tissue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruments</td>
<td>Stop and chop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IOL insertion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CAT-C intermediate courses</th>
<th>CAT-D advanced courses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capsulorhexis</td>
<td>Capsulorhexis erratic tear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divide and conquer</td>
<td>Weak structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chopping</td>
<td>White cataracts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irrigation/aspiration</td>
<td>Capsular plaques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toric IOLs</td>
<td>Varying cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anterior vitrectomy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Abbreviation: IOL, intraocular lens.

Note: Module performance is calculated using pertinent scoring criteria: target achievement, efficiency, instrument handling, tissue treatment, etc. A “cataract challenge” is presented every 60 minutes of training time in the beginners’ intermediate, and advanced courses.

Furthermore, the only randomized controlled trial comparing resident performance after VRS versus wet laboratory training highlighted equally realistic training environments as rated by study participants. The Eyesi was deemed a safe alternative that could also effectively predict future operating performance, thus calling attention to trainees who may require extra assistance early. Though the wet laboratory seems to offer more effective orientation to the surgical microscope and instruments, increased need for in-person mentorship and expense of machinery maintenance, instrumentation, and the eyes themselves present obstacles to training programs. Overall, VRS offers consistent, repeatable intraocular scenarios and immediate feedback without equal need for human supervision or recurrent material costs.

Overall

Multiple studies met inclusion criteria in each year since 2010, indicating a steady release of publications throughout the decade. Works investigated the utility of VRS in capacities related to training, assessment, or both—at times in the context of inherent operator characteristics or under varying conditions. The majority reported reduced operative time and complication rates, or improved self-perceived competency and peer evaluations with structured simulation-based training. From this review of the current literature, we posit that the ideal VRS-based cataract surgery curriculum would adhere to the following core principles:

- Commence early with novice surgeons in the first year of residency training.29,49,56
- Adopt a proficiency-based rather than time-based learning approach, by which the trainee practices under increasingly difficult conditions until performance exceeds pre-defined pass/fail levels.16,17,29,48,50,56
- Utilize spaced repetition and global score targets in a curriculum of diverse abstract and procedural tasks of increasing difficulty (antitremor, forceps manipulation, etc.)
- Emphasize deliberate practice of targeted capsulorhexis and phacoemulsification tasks—deemed the most difficult by novice surgeons.57
- Complement a concurrent, supervised wet laboratory curriculum providing additional experience with tissue manipulation and orientation to the live operating environment.11,12
- Provide ongoing reinforcement throughout residency training via immediate simulator-based feedback, self-assessment questionnaire,24 and routine faculty evaluation.

Finally, given overall heterogeneity of design and small size of prior studies, the creation of a large educational network for VRS-based cataract surgery training may offer additional value. A movement toward evidence-based standardization and evaluation of surgical curricula in multicenter trials utilizing VRS module scores, total simulation hours, self-assessment results, and other metrics could be networked to the American Academy of Ophthalmology as the basis for prospective studies. While VRS has seemingly asserted itself as a valuable component of the modern cataract surgery education program, broader collaboration is necessary.

resident.29 Lowry et al modeled operating room savings associated with Eyesi use based on presumed shortened surgical times alone. Cost savings ranged widely but were closely associated with resident program size and duration of Eyesi use, in some cases offsetting a significant portion of the estimated $150,000 simulator purchase price.35 Theoretical savings attributed to reduction in complication rates or need for human mentoring were not considered in this model but would likely offer additional benefit.56

More recently, Ferris et al’s large study describing PCR rates of early career surgeons with and without Eyesi access also modeled savings based on reduced costs incurred by PCR and other complications, in addition to cost of medical negligence claims. The group estimated a 280-case reduction in total resident PCR complications per year across all sites with Eyesi training implementation, corresponding to £560,000 in savings to the United Kingdom National Health Service annually and recoupment of aggregated simulator sticker price within 4 years. Therefore, VRS training was found to be beneficial in terms of both quality optimization and cost limitation.21

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has the potential to further optimize training by improving patient outcomes and enhancing cost-effectiveness.

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Conflict of Interest
None declared.

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