

## A round-up of the eye-related hot topics that have been trending on social media over the last few weeks.

ife, at least from headlines, is certainly awakening again.

### #DominicCummings #Specsavers #BarnardCastleeyetest

In one of the bizarre developments of #coronaviruslife, Dominic Cummings, Boris Johnson's most senior advisor, claimed he drove to Barnard Castle from Durham to test his eyesight. He had already created commotion by driving 264 miles from London to Durham, whilst symptomatic with COVID-19, which in itself was against the rules of lockdown [1]. All hell broke loose when it emerged that additionally he had undertaken an extra 30-mile non-essential trip with the preposterous reasoning that he had to drive to test his eyesight [1]. Cue the memes and Twitter mockery. To name a few – A "Barnard Castle" Snellen chart [2], Specsavers' new advertisement, with 'Specsavers' being replaced by 'Barnard Castle' in their logo [3], another Specsavers' advertisement with the tagline "Don't come to us, go for a 30 mile drive" [4]. More worryingly, the chairman of the Police Federation actually felt it necessary to tweet a Public Service Announcement (PSA) imploring the public not to drive should they feel their vision was impaired, as he had investigated many serious vehicle collisions where impaired eyesight was a factor [5]. This was notwithstanding the impact of Cumming's actions on the public's trust in the UK government and subsequent adherence to lockdown measures. It's quite simple really – don't drive if you cannae see!

### #Aldi #blind #kickedout

A blind key worker in Thornton, near Liverpool, was asked to leave as he was shopping with his girlfriend on behalf of their elderly neighbours. He explained he needed his girlfriend as his vision was not good enough to allow him to shop by himself, but the security guard told him to "get out" as it was against Aldi's policy of only one person per trolley [6]. Aldi subsequently apologised to him [6]. Similarly, a blind woman shopping in Kettering was told she could not shop with the sighted person she had brought with her, though in her case the security guard allowed her to carry on "this time" [7]. Unfortunately, this experience made her feel she could no longer go out and do her own shopping, thus limiting her independence. Aldi did apologise a month

later and sent £30 of gift vouchers, but this did not assuage the feelings of being made to feel vulnerable and inferior [7].

### #Physicaldistancing #blind #independence

Physical distancing poses additional challenges to visually impaired people that sighted people do not face, as they cannot see how close people are, their guide dogs are not trained to keep 2m away from others, and they cannot see whether others are wearing masks [8-10]. Grocery stores, in particular, are difficult, as often stores are depending on visual signs alone and discourage adults entering with another adult [10]. For a person who is visually impaired but not blind, they may not be able to detect when others suddenly appear in their blind spots, nor can they see people approaching them until they are well within the 2m distance, and some may need to hold objects up close to their face [11]. They are even shouted at because some members of the ignorant public think they are flouting the social distancing rules [9,11]. The difficulties of the visually impaired were eloquently expressed by several visually impaired people in a video shared by the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) [12]. Both the RNIB and the Canadian Council of the Blind have published findings detailing the difficulties faced by visually impaired individuals in adhering to physical distancing and maintaining their independence in this 'new normal', which seems to be leaving them behind. Perhaps the kindest thing we as individuals can do right now is to be aware of and sensitive to this. As best said by a *Guardian* columnist's friend Dave, "As independent as we might like to think we are, the fact is that we're always relying on the thoughtfulness of strangers" [13].

### #eyeinjuries #rubberbullets #police #protests #contactlenses

On the first weekend of protests following George Floyd's murder, at least two people had lost an eye due to the use of rubber bullets and other projectiles used by police as control measures. Indiana man Balin Brake had his injury documented and posted by another Twitter user. His right eye is bloody, akin to a scene from a war or horror film (Warning: not for the faint-hearted) [14]. It transpired he lost his eye due to globe rupture, after a police tear gas

canister hit his eye [15]. Journalist Linda Tirado posted in camaraderie "Hey we're twins", as she too had lost her eye from a police rubber bullet that same weekend [15,16]. Currently, it is estimated that at least 20 people in America have suffered from serious eye injuries due to police control measures during the protests [17].

A hilarious, but medically incorrect, PSA from a concerned member of the public had in capitals "DO NOT WEAR CONTACTS TO ANY PROTEST", with the reasoning that tear gas would cause the contact lenses to become "permanently glued" to one's eyes [18]. This was picked up by Dr Glaucomflecken, who agreed contact lenses in a protest were less than ideal, but that it was not possible for them to become glued to one's eyeballs. He did acquiesce that if the hyperbolic warning was what it took to keep eyes safe, then so be it [19].

### #SirineJahangir #Britain'sGotTalent

Let's end with a feel-good story. Sirine is a 14-year-old contestant in *Britain's Got Talent*. She lost her vision by age 10 due to a progressive condition affecting her optic nerves [20]. Music became her comfort, and she taught herself to play the piano after she became blind [21]. Her talent made an impression, and her audition ended to a standing ovation [20]. The live shows have been postponed due to lockdown, but it seems Sirine has already succeeded in one aim, which was to inspire other visually impaired people not to give up on their dreams [22].

References available on request or online.

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