

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

#GeneralElection #RightToVote

It goes without saying that the general election has been dominating the headlines and with it, the challenges many voters face. The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) have highlighted how inaccessible voting can be for people with sight loss. Their research has shown that only 13% of those with vision loss felt that they could vote independently and in secret, a right that we can all agree should be applicable to everyone [1]. The only legal requirement in polling stations is for the option of a selector, which is a plastic overlay of braille numbers to identify candidates, but still needs the voter to be accompanied. Blind voters have said that while this may be a friend or family member, in some instances it will be a complete stranger working at the station, which can make them feel "less important" or that they are "not included." In an interview with *The Guardian*, one voter said that in a previous election the polling officer had skipped the name of a candidate, while others reported being scoffed at for their choice or having their selection read aloud for everyone to hear [2]. By raising awareness at a time when voting is on everyone's mind, charities like the RNIB are hoping the Labour government will introduce further measures to allow every voter to cast their ballot with the same level of integrity.

#RoleModels #FacingAdversity

It is certainly important to shine a light on the adversity faced by those with sight impairment, but there have also been a number of recent stories on role models in the visually impaired community. The King's Birthday Honours included Saima Ashraf, the first ever registered blind chartered public accountant, who now works for the Merseyside Police and has been recognised for her services to policing and community work [3]. In Blackpool Tower, the Open Worlds Dance Competition featured a category for the blind, marking the first time in the UK these dancers could compete in an international competition [4]. While doing the rounds on a press tour, Hollywood frontman Jake Gyllenhaal has been opening up about being legally blind [5]. He talked about how he has used this to his advantage though his career, one example being that he could listen more intently in a particularly emotional scene, with the visual blur allowing him to focus on his other senses. Fellow A-lister Jeremy Renner made an appearance on *The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon* to talk about his snow-plough incident earlier in the year.

He described, at one moment, "I could see my left eyeball with my right eyeball," as he explained that one eye was hanging out of his head [6]. It was a shocking thing to go through and I was so happy to see him on the show having made an excellent recovery, with a life-affirming story that was surprisingly so full of positivity. But you don't need to be a megastar to be an inspiration. Two teenage brothers blinded by a retinal dystrophy undertook an eight-hour walk in the Yorkshire Dales to raise money for their visually impaired cricket club, while a former Red Arrows pilot with glaucoma is running the length of the country to raise awareness and money for further research into his condition [7,8].

#Atlas #Superman

The sci-fi movie *Atlas* was released on Netflix, being watched by over 28 million people in its first week [9], but there is one scene I found particularly memorable. The movie's titular evil AI goes to torture a colonel, played by actor Sterling K Brown, with a needle to the eye. Brown described how one of the producer's fathers is an ophthalmologist, bringing in a speculum and anaesthetic eye drops to allow the actor to play out the scene and have his own eye opened wide and darting around ahead of the torture, without the use of CGI [10]. Speaking of movies, director James Gunn released stills for the upcoming *Superman* movie, with what seemed to be a giant floating eyeball in the sky behind our hero. This prompted much discussion online as to what could possibly be going on. While we don't have confirmation, it seems that it may represent the Emerald Eye of Ekron, the lost eyeball of a ginormous mystical entity that can be used as a weapon of great power [11]. I am always happy to see massive eyeballs in mainstream media, so am even more hyped for the movie's release!

#OcularInjuries

Of all the articles I get sent by friends who know I write for *Eye News*, stories of ocular injuries come up most frequently. Numerous outlets picked up on reports of an American man who suffered a rather unfortunate injury, getting stung by a bee in his right eye [12]. The barbed stinger broke off in his eye and embedded in his cornea, requiring a couple of trips to hospital to be fully removed. However, there are others who did not have such a good outcome. Royal Navy technician Elliott Courtman has been in the news having lost his left eye after being stabbed into it at work by an antenna without its protective covering [13].

Having lost his career, he is now calling on the government for better physical and mental support for soldiers who suffer similar trauma, to not simply instil a culture of "just get on with things." In a TikTok video with over 1.8 million views, Hannah Oliver has spoken about being in a car accident while wearing sunglasses [14]. When the airbag deployed, the lens of the glasses shattered, sending shards of plastic into her eye, which eventually had to be removed. She has since started her own company producing shatter resistant sunglasses, to prevent others suffering the same harm that she has.

References

- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cekk4j31lvo>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/society/article/2024/jun/26/mib-blind-people-vote-independently-elections-uk>
- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c0kkr88194o>
- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c4n1w35g0q5o>
- <https://metro.co.uk/2024/06/06/jake-gyllenhaal-legally-blind-never-known-anything-else-20988170>
- <https://www.thesun.co.uk/tvandshowbiz/28812336/jeremy-renner-horror-accident-recovery/>
- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-york-north-yorkshire-69015356>
- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c288p9k2e2zo>
- <https://tvline.com/ratings/jennifer-lopez-atlas-netflix-movie-28-million-views-1235251517/>
- <https://ew.com/sterling-k-brown-filmed-atlas-eyeball-torture-scene-without-anesthesia-8656712>
- <https://reactormag.com/heres-our-first-look-of-david-corenswets-superman-but-whats-that-giant-eyeball-behind-him/>
- <https://metro.co.uk/2024/07/03/man-stung-a-bee-horrific-place-not-think-21150851/amp/>
- <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/royal-navy-technician-lost-eye-33030513>
- <https://uk.news.yahoo.com/womans-sunglasses-warning-she-loses-131444443.html>

[All links last accessed July 2024]

SECTION EDITOR



Amit Dhalla,

Specialty Registrar Year 4, Scunthorpe General Hospital, UK.

amit.dhalla@nhs.net