



Podcasting in Ophthalmology: Advancing Education, Knowledge Dissemination, and Implications for Health Equity

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Abstract: Podcasts have emerged as a prominent medium for disseminating health information in the digital era, offering on-demand, accessible content for both clinicians and the public. Within medicine, and increasingly within ophthalmology, podcasts are used for education, research dissemination, and patient engagement. Their low cost, asynchronous format, and broad accessibility also present a promising yet underutilized strategy for addressing social determinants of health (SDOH) by expanding access to reliable, equity-focused patient education and helping to overcome barriers to specialty care that contribute to preventable vision loss. This literature review examines the evolution of podcasting as a tool for medical education and public health communication, with a focused analysis of its current applications, benefits, and limitations within ophthalmology.

Keywords: podcast, medical podcasting, ophthalmology education, social determinants of health, social media

Introduction

In an era of rapidly evolving technology, patients and physicians alike have turned to social media for the dissemination of health information. Among these platforms, podcasts - a term that combines “iPod” and “broadcasting” - have emerged as a widely used medium for delivering on-demand audio content across a range of topics, including medicine and public health.¹ Since their emergence in the early 2000s alongside portable digital media and internet-based distribution systems, podcasts have grown substantially with the expansion of smartphone ownership and the development of streaming platforms such as Apple Podcasts, Spotify, and Google Podcasts.^{2,3} The growing popularity of podcasts has led many individuals to rely on them as a primary source of information on world news, politics, and health. However, despite their widespread reach, concerns remain about the accuracy, quality control, and educational value of podcast content, underscoring the need to carefully evaluate their role in disseminating medical knowledge.

Medical Education and Knowledge Dissemination via Podcasts

The use of podcasting in medicine has expanded across two primary domains: medical education and research. For physicians, medical trainees, and students, podcasts offer a flexible alternative to traditional learning modalities, and many listeners report that podcast-based education provides an experience comparable to lecture-based learning.⁴ With their integration into mainstream media, major scientific journals - including *The New England Journal of Medicine*, *Journal of the American Medical Association*, the *American Journal of Ophthalmology*, and others - have begun producing podcasts for public access.^{4,5} These episodes allow listeners to engage with a wide range of topics presented in multiple formats, including clinical discussions, case-based learning, ethical debates, procedural instruction, and journal article summaries.⁴ Beyond education, podcasting serves as a growing medium for research dissemination. Scholarly podcasts enable investigators to share findings with the public, promote transparency, and increase accessibility by providing free access to discussions of research that might otherwise be restricted by traditional paywalls.⁶ However,



the audio-only nature of podcasts introduces unique challenges, particularly for teaching content that traditionally relies on visual materials, such as imaging, procedural demonstrations, or complex diagrams. To address these limitations, many creators supplement audio content with show notes, visual aids, companion videos, or interactive online resources, enabling listeners to engage with multimodal content. By doing so, podcasts in medicine are evolving beyond simple lectures toward a more integrated educational experience, although robust evidence assessing their impact on long-term learning outcomes or clinical performance remains limited. Podcasting, therefore, offers a cognitively flexible, cost-effective, and scalable means of delivering medical information to audiences broader than those typically reached through conventional academic channels.

Equity, Access, and Social Determinants of Health

Medical podcasts present an underutilized opportunity to address social determinants of health (SDOH) in patient education by expanding access to reliable, equity-focused health information. Because podcasts are low-cost, asynchronous, and widely accessible across devices, they can overcome barriers such as limited transportation, geographic isolation, and time constraints that disproportionately affect underserved communities. A 2025 systematic review found that well-designed health podcasts improve knowledge retention and engagement across diverse populations, reinforcing their potential as tools for public-facing education.⁷ In ophthalmology - where disparities in socioeconomic status, insurance coverage, health literacy, and access to specialty care directly influence the burden of preventable vision loss - podcasts could provide targeted, culturally relevant information on eye disease prevention, navigating vision care resources, and recognizing early symptoms requiring evaluation. When intentionally crafted with accessible language, multilingual options, and expert-vetted content, medical podcasts can function as a flexible medium in community organizations to help mitigate key social determinants that drive inequities in ocular health outcomes.⁷

Current State of Ophthalmology Podcasting

As the field of medical podcasting expands, a growing number of podcasts have emerged specifically in the field of ophthalmology. The American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) EyeWiki reports twenty-six active ophthalmology-related podcasts covering a range of topics and intended audiences.⁵ For example, Eyes for Ears provides board-review-style content for trainees; MedEdTalks-Ophthalmology offers accredited continuing-education content for practitioners; Experts InSight sponsored and produced by the AAO, presents expert interviews and updates across subspecialties; and the American Journal of Ophthalmology Podcasts Collection helps disseminate recent peer-reviewed research to a broader audience through interviews with authors.⁵ A recent quantitative analysis found that among a larger set of ninety-six identified ophthalmology podcasts (3,594 episodes), the most common content types were clinical education and procedural topics, with retina-related subjects being the most frequently covered subspecialty.⁸ Importantly, there is emerging evidence for educational impact: in one observational study of “Eyes for Ears,” the podcast amassed over 422,000 total downloads (approximately 4,442 per episode), with listeners from more than 110 countries, suggesting a robust international audience.⁹ However, beyond usage metrics and self-reported listener satisfaction, rigorous data on long-term outcomes, such as improvements in clinical performance or effects on patient care, remain sparse within the field of ophthalmology.

Institutional Podcasting: The American Academy of Ophthalmology Experience

The American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) journal has recently expanded its educational outreach through the development of its official podcast, *Ophthalmology Journal*. First released in February 2022, the podcast was created to provide ophthalmologists, trainees, and allied eye-care professionals with accessible, up-to-date discussions on clinical practice, emerging research, and expert perspectives across subspecialties.¹⁰ Since its launch, the series has grown to ninety-six episodes and continues to publish new content on a regular release schedule.¹⁰ Its audience reach has increased steadily, with an estimated 202,500 annual downloads in 2024 and 129,317 downloads between January 2025 and July 2025. These metrics are based on Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB)-certified downloads, which apply

standardized industry guidelines used by Libsyn and other podcasting platforms to define and validate download counts.¹¹ Through its combination of expert and author interviews, timely article reviews, and evidence-based discussions, the AAO podcast has been successful.

Patient Education Podcasts

Patient-facing ophthalmology podcasts remain less common than clinician-directed content but provide an early demonstration of how widely accessible education can be delivered to the public. The Focus on Eye Health Podcast, produced by Prevent Blindness, offers plain-language discussions on eye disease prevention, vision safety, and public health topics intended for patients and caregivers.¹² *Doctor Eye Health* by Dr. Joseph Allen, OD, addresses common vision concerns for general audiences.¹³ These organization- and doctor-produced podcasts demonstrate the feasibility of using structured, patient-oriented audio content to supplement traditional educational materials, although quality control for accuracy and systematic evaluation of their reach and impact on SDOH remains limited.

How to Design High-Quality Ophthalmology Podcasts

Building on the success of established programs such as the *Ophthalmology Journal* podcast, the development of a new medical or ophthalmology-focused podcast requires careful planning and attention to several foundational elements.² The process begins with defining the podcast's purpose and intended audience, whether the aim is to deliver clinical updates, highlight new research, support board preparation, or engage ophthalmologists in subspecialty discussions.⁸ A clear editorial vision supports consistent, high-quality content and helps determine the appropriate hosts, experts, and format for each episode. Equally important are the technical aspects of production: ensuring high-quality audio recordings, implementing structured episode outlines, and adopting consistent branding all contribute to listener engagement and credibility. Distribution planning includes selecting a reliable hosting platform, optimizing metadata, and syndicating content across major podcasting services such as Apple Podcasts, Spotify, and Google Podcasts to reach the widest audience. As ophthalmology podcasts often communicate complex clinical concepts or interpretations of new research, maintaining accuracy is essential; incorporating subject-matter expert review or internal quality-control processes can help safeguard the reliability of information.⁴ Long-term sustainability depends on setting a realistic publishing cadence, monitoring listener analytics, and, when possible, securing institutional support similar to that provided by professional societies like the AAO.¹⁰ When these considerations are thoughtfully addressed, new ophthalmology podcasts can serve as impactful, scalable tools for education and knowledge dissemination across the field.

Quality Control and Educational Limitations

Several limitations warrant careful consideration as medical podcasts continue to gain popularity. One of the most prominent concerns is the risk of disseminating misinformation due to the absence of universal, evidence-based guidelines governing the accuracy or quality of podcast content.⁴ Although general guidelines and best-practice recommendations for creating medical podcasts exist,¹⁴ these resources are not a substitute for a formal peer-review system, leaving podcast content vulnerable to inaccuracies or biased interpretations. Additionally, there has been limited empirical evaluation of the educational impact of medical podcasts.⁴ Current literature suggests that podcasting is most beneficial when used as an adjunct to traditional teaching methods rather than a replacement.⁴ In their review, Cho et al concluded that while learners often express high satisfaction with podcast-based education, objective evidence demonstrating improvements in knowledge retention, clinical competency, or patient outcomes remains insufficient.⁴ Importantly, existing discussions have largely neglected the influence of commercial, institutional, or potential biases on podcast content, as well as the role of regional censorship in shaping access to medical information. As the field grows, further research is needed to clarify the optimal role of podcasts in medical education, develop strategies to ensure content accuracy, and establish safeguards that maintain the integrity of medical information shared through this increasingly influential medium.

Conclusion

Podcasts represent a highly effective and adaptable tool for advancing both professional education and public health outreach in ophthalmology. With the ability to deliver on-demand, adaptable content, podcasts are uniquely positioned to enhance the learning experience for healthcare professionals at all stages of their careers. The wide range of topics available - from clinical updates and innovative research to patient education on eye health and beyond - ensures that ophthalmology podcasts can serve a broad audience. Podcasts offer a unique opportunity to tackle health disparities by providing accessible, culturally relevant information to underserved populations, helping to bridge gaps in health literacy and mitigate the social determinants of ocular health.⁷ However, despite their growing popularity, several challenges remain. The lack of a formal peer-review process for podcast content raises concerns about the accuracy and quality of information being disseminated, and further review is needed to assess the long-term impact of podcasts on education, clinical proficiency, and patient experience. Ultimately, as podcasting continues to mature within the field of ophthalmology, it holds the potential to reshape how knowledge is shared and consumed, creating an inclusive, scalable, and dynamic tool for both professional development and public health education. With careful planning, collaboration, and a commitment to high-quality content, ophthalmology podcasts can help ensure that vital information reaches the widest possible audience, fostering a more informed, empowered, and equitable healthcare environment.

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