Response to ‘Decline in the use of phototherapy in France from 2010 to 2019’
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Dear Editor,

We share the concerns of Aubin et al. on the decline of ultraviolet (UV) phototherapy in France and the decline of dermatologists prescribing phototherapy. As they have highlighted, phototherapy is an important cost-effective and well researched tool with a well-known, minor risk profile when administered appropriately. In 2002, after audit highlighted issues with phototherapy services in Scotland, a national managed clinical network (Photonet) was established. The network’s vision is that all patients with skin conditions that respond to light therapy will be offered appropriate phototherapy wherever they live in Scotland and that this phototherapy will be as effective and safe as possible. To achieve this mission Photonet has established a number of standards and hosts a centralised database of treatment records to enable yearly audit. Photonet also actively engages with its stakeholders, providing educational events, online training modules and a patient feedback service. The result is a cohort of well-educated and engaged dermatologists, nurses and medical physicists across the country.

We believe that the network has played a large part in Scotland’s stable phototherapy numbers over the past ten years, despite the increased availability of targeted therapies during this period. In 2019 the number of UV phototherapy courses per 100,000 of the population in Scotland was approximately the same as in 2010, in stark contrast to the experience in France (Table 1). In addition there were 42 operational phototherapy centres in Scotland in 2019, compared with 34 in 2010. Phototherapy delivery peaked in Scotland in 2016 and, whilst there had been a slight decline since, the numbers were relatively stable until the emergence of Covid-19. The global pandemic has severely affected phototherapy provision across Scotland and the 47% decline in UV courses in 2020 compared with 2010 masks a more severe situation as the data includes 3 months pre-pandemic (Jan – March 2020).

There are challenging years ahead for phototherapy requiring adapted ways of operating (home phototherapy for example). However as Aubin et al. elucidate it would be “deleterious to our speciality to give up phototherapy”. We too believe in the importance of phototherapy and we believe that, as Photonet has demonstrated, a strong network of engaged, educated professionals can ensure the modality’s continued prominence.

References

Table 1: Phototherapy in Scotland: Quantitative data from Photosys, a national UV Phototherapy Database provided by Photonet (https://www.photonet.scot.nhs.uk); a versus 2008; b versus 2010.

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