Performance of a Deep-Learning Algorithm vs Manual Grading for Detecting Diabetic Retinopathy in India

Varun Gulshan, PhD; Renu P. Rajan, MD; Kasumi Widner, MS; Derek Wu, BS; Peter Wubbels, BA; Tyler Rhodes, BS; Kira Whitehouse, BA; Marc Coram, PhD; Greg Corrado, PhD; Kim Ramasamy, MD; Rajiv Raman, MD; Lily Peng, MD, PhD; Dale R. Webster, PhD

IMPORTANCE More than 60 million people in India have diabetes and are at risk for diabetic retinopathy (DR), a vision-threatening disease. Automated interpretation of retinal fundus photographs can help support and scale a robust screening program to detect DR.

OBJECTIVE To prospectively validate the performance of an automated DR system across 2 sites in India.

DESIGN, SETTING, AND PARTICIPANTS This prospective observational study was conducted at 2 eye care centers in India (Aravind Eye Hospital and Sankara Nethralaya) and included 3049 patients with diabetes. Data collection and patient enrollment took place between April 2016 and July 2016 at Aravind and May 2016 and April 2017 at Sankara Nethralaya. The model was trained and fixed in March 2016.

INTERVENTIONS Automated DR grading system compared with manual grading by 1 trained grader and 1 retina specialist from each site. Adjudication by a panel of 3 retinal specialists served as the reference standard in the cases of disagreement.

MAIN OUTCOMES AND MEASURES Sensitivity and specificity for moderate or worse DR or referable diabetic macula edema.

RESULTS Of 3049 patients, 1091 (35.8%) were women and the mean (SD) age for patients at Aravind and Sankara Nethralaya was 56.6 (9.0) years and 56.0 (10.0) years, respectively. For moderate or worse DR, the sensitivity and specificity for manual grading by individual nonadjudicator graders ranged from 73.4% to 89.8% and from 83.5% to 98.7%, respectively. The automated DR system's performance was equal to or exceeded manual grading, with an 88.9% sensitivity (95% CI, 85.8-91.5), 92.2% specificity (95% CI, 90.3-93.8), and an area under the curve of 0.963 on the data set from Aravind Eye Hospital and 92.1% sensitivity (95% CI, 90.1-93.8), 95.2% specificity (95% CI, 94.2-96.1), and an area under the curve of 0.980 on the data set from Sankara Nethralaya.

CONCLUSIONS AND RELEVANCE This study shows that the automated DR system generalizes to this population of Indian patients in a prospective setting and demonstrates the feasibility of using an automated DR grading system to expand screening programs.

Published online June 13, 2019.

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n India, an estimated 60 million people have diabetes. One serious complication of diabetes is diabetic retinopathy (DR), a major cause of avoidable blindness worldwide. Diabetic retinopathy affects approximately 12% to 18% of patients with diabetes in India. In lower-income health care environments, the key challenges to addressing DR include a lack of symptoms until the disease has progressed to vision loss, a large population of patients with diabetes who require screening, and a shortage of eye care specialists. Although most guidelines worldwide recommend yearly screenings, various medical image classification tasks, including retinal imaging, specifically for DR, multiple groups have shown that deep learning can be leveraged to produce expert-level diagnoses for grading fundus photography images and resulting products have since been validated prospectively to obtain regulatory approval. In this study, we build on this work by studying the use of an automated DR grading software and comparing its performance with that of manual grading in a prospective setting in 2 centers in India.

Methods

Algorithm Development
Deep neural networks were trained and validated using the methods described by Gulshan et al to produce algorithms that grade retinal fundus photography images according to the International Clinical Diabetic Retinopathy (ICDR) severity scale. The network was trained to make multiple binary classifications: (1) moderate or worse DR (ie, moderate, severe, or proliferative), (2) severe or worse DR, (3) referable diabetic macular edema (DME), (4) fullygradable. In addition to these binary classifications used by Gulshan et al, we also trained the model to make a multiway classification of the 5-point ICDR grade. While the model was trained to make the various predictions described previously, only 2 outputs of the model were used and measured during the trial; one was for referable DR and the other was for referable DME. An image was considered referable for DR if it had moderate or worse DR. Hard exudates within 1 disc diameter of the macula was used as a proxy for referable DME. The algorithm’s threshold for the presence of referable DR (also known as the operating point) and DME was optimized for a high sensitivity suitable for a screening use case (eMethods in the Supplement).

Study Population
This prospective study was conducted at 2 tertiary eye care centers in South India, Aravind Eye Hospital and Sankara Nethra. The study protocol was approved by the ethics committee of both institutions. Written informed consent was obtained from each patient. Data collection and enrollment took place between April 2016 and July 2016 at Aravind and May 2016 and April 2017 at Sankara. A total of 997 patients were enrolled at Aravind and 2052 at Sankara. At Aravind, approximately 499 patients (50%) were recruited at the general ophthalmology clinics from patients who were known to have diabetes but had not previously received a retinal examination and the remaining 498 patients with diabetes (50%) who presented directly to the vitreoretinal clinic. At Sankara, approximately 841 patients (41%) were recruited from patients with diabetes who were visiting the vitreoretinal clinic and the remaining 1211 patients (59%) with diabetes who presented at the teleophthalmology community screenings during the same period.

The inclusion criteria consisted of patients who were older than 40 years and previously received a diabetes diagnosis. The exclusion criteria consisted of patients with a history of any intraocular surgery other than cataract surgery; ocular laser treatments for any retinal disease; ocular injections for DME or proliferative disease; a history of any other retinal vascular disease, glaucoma, or other diseases that may affect the appearance of the retina or optic disc; medical conditions that would be a contraindication to dilation; overt media opacity; or gestational diabetes.

Study Procedure
Patient eligibility was determined by reviewing their medical records on presentation to the clinic. All eligible patients underwent nonmydriatic fundus photography using a retinal fundus camera (NM TRC; Topcon Medical Systems; 3nethra; Forus Health) to capture a macula-centered 40° to 45° fundus photograph. As per the usual center-specific workflow, all images for Aravind were taken using the Forus 3nethra camera, and for Sankara approximately 94% of images were taken using the Forus 3nethra; the rest were taken using the Topcon NM TRC. Following imaging, patients underwent a routine, dilated fundus examination by a retinal specialist. Patients were advised and provided treatment based on the retinal specialist examination per standard guidelines. The results of additional grading by the software and additional graders were not available to the treating retinal specialist to ensure that standard clini-
Table 1. Baseline Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>No. (%)</th>
<th>Development</th>
<th>Clinical Validation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Train</td>
<td>Tune</td>
<td>Aravind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Images, total No.</strong></td>
<td>103 634</td>
<td>40 790</td>
<td>1983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Patient demographics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique individuals, total No.</td>
<td>54 149</td>
<td>20 860</td>
<td>997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age, mean (SD), y&lt;sup&gt;r&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>55.3 (11.2)</td>
<td>55.2 (11.1)</td>
<td>56.6 (9.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female/total patients for whom sex was known, %</td>
<td>27 760/46 360 (59.9)</td>
<td>10 457/17 260 (60.6)</td>
<td>418/997 (41.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Image quality distribution</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Images for which DR was gradable/total images where gradeability was assessed&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>41 984/55 265 (76.0)</td>
<td>23 176/27 951 (82.9)</td>
<td>1905/1983 (96.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Images where DME was gradable/total images for which gradeability was assessed, %&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>41 984/55 265 (76.0)</td>
<td>23 176/27 951 (82.9)</td>
<td>1946/1983 (98.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disease severity distribution</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total images for which DR was assessed</td>
<td>98 688 (100.0)</td>
<td>39 190 (100.0)</td>
<td>1905 (100.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No DR</td>
<td>49 082 (49.7)</td>
<td>23 045 (58.8)</td>
<td>1213 (63.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mild</td>
<td>20 220 (20.5)</td>
<td>6625 (16.9)</td>
<td>52 (2.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>21 417 (21.7)</td>
<td>6844 (17.5)</td>
<td>477 (25.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe</td>
<td>40 704 (41.0)</td>
<td>1384 (3.5)</td>
<td>77 (4.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proliferative</td>
<td>3899 (4.0)</td>
<td>1292 (3.3)</td>
<td>86 (4.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total images for which DME was assessed</td>
<td>96 394 (100.0)</td>
<td>38 776 (100.0)</td>
<td>1946 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referable DME</td>
<td>14 159 (14.7)</td>
<td>4634 (12.0)</td>
<td>429 (22.0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Abbreviations: DME, diabetic macular edema; DR, diabetic retinopathy.

<sup>a</sup> A summary of image characteristics and available demographic information in the development and validation datasets. The adjudicated reference standard was used for computing the DR and DME distributions on the clinical validation datasets, and the majority reference standard was used for the development datasets.

<sup>b</sup> Unique patient codes (deidentified) were only available for 89,997 images (86.8%) in the training set and 36,976 images (90.6%) in the tuning set.

<sup>c</sup> Age was available only for 46,351 individuals in the training set and 17,254 individuals in the tuning set.

<sup>d</sup> For the training and tuning sets, only a single image quality assessment was done as opposed to separate DR and DME gradability assessments for the clinical validation sets.

**Grading and Adjudication**

A detailed description of grading and adjudication is described in the eMethods in the Supplement. Nonmydriatic fundus photography images were sent for manual grading by a trained grader (a nonphysician) and retinal specialist at each of the sites using the ICDR scale. At Aravind, the trained grader had 7 months of DR grading experience and the retinal specialist had been practicing for 15 months. At Sankara, the trained grader had 5 years of DR grading experience and the retinal specialist had been practicing for 10 years. Each of the graders was masked to the grading by other graders, algorithm, and the results of the in-person dilated fundus examination.

For Aravind, all images from the study were adjudicated by a panel of 3 senior retinal specialists using the protocol described by Krause et al.<sup>16</sup> The adjudicating retinal specialists first graded each of the images independently. Any disagreements between adjudicating retinal specialists were discussed until a full consensus was achieved. For Sankara, because of the larger number of images, the reference standard was determined using a modified protocol as follows: if all graders, including the algorithm, selected the same grade (ie, a 5-point ICDR grade and referable DME), this grade was accepted as the ground truth. Otherwise, the image was sent for adjudication using the same protocol as Aravind. In addition, 10% of full-agreement images (ie, images for which the algorithm and the clinical site’s retinal specialist and trained grader all agreed on the grade) were sent for adjudication by the panel of retinal specialists.

**Subsequent Model Development**

During the course of the prospective data collection period, we made additional improvements to the model, including tuning the models with adjudicated data as reported by Krause et al.<sup>16</sup> The improvements can be summarized as (1) larger training sets, (2) better hyperparameter exploration (tuning), (3) larger input image resolution, and (4) using the improved Inception-v4<sup>21</sup> neural network architecture. We graded the images using the model from Krause et al<sup>16</sup> retrospectively at the conclusion of the study.

**Statistical Analysis**

To characterize the sensitivity and specificity of the algorithm with respect to the reference standard, 2 × 2 tables were generated. The 95% confidence intervals for the sensitivity and specificity of the algorithm were calculated to be exact Clopper-Pearson intervals<sup>22</sup> that corresponded to separate 2-sided confidence intervals with individual coverage probabilities of the square root of 0.95 being approximate to 0.975. These simultaneous 2-sided confidence intervals were computed using StatsModels, version 0.6.1 (Python) and statistical significance was set at P < .05. Additional details on sample size calculation are in the eMethods in the Supplement.

**Results**

In total, 3049 patients were enrolled in this study (Table 1). The mean (SD) age of enrolled patients was 56.6 (9.0) and 56.0 (10.0) years at Aravind and Sankara, respectively. Women comprised 418 patients (41.9%) at Aravind and 673 patients (32.8%)
at Sankara. Because this study recruited from both eye clinics and a general screening pool, the study population was enriched for more severe forms of DR.

The performance of each type of grader is shown in Table 2. Of allgradable images for moderate or worse DR, the trained grader from Aravind had a 75.7% sensitivity and 94.2% specificity and the retinal specialist had a 89.8% sensitivity and 83.5% specificity. The trained grader from Sankara had a 84.2% sensitivity and 98.6% specificity and the retinal specialist had a 73.4% sensitivity and 98.7% specificity. At the predefined operating point, the algorithm had a sensitivity of 88.9% and specificity of 92.2% on the Aravind data (with an area under the curve [AUC] of 0.963) and a sensitivity of 92.1% and specificity of 95.2% on the Sankara data (with an AUC of 0.983) (Figure 1).

For referable DME, the trained grader from Aravind had a 74.0% sensitivity and 95.6% specificity and the retinal specialist had a 89.5% sensitivity and 93.8% specificity. The trained grader from Sankara had a 75.1% sensitivity and 97.7% specificity and the retinal specialist had a 57.5% sensitivity and 99.3% specificity. At the predefined operating point, the algorithm had a sensitivity of 97.4% and specificity of 90.7% on the combined data set, this corresponded to an AUC of 0.986 for the new model vs 0.974 on the old model for detecting referable DME. This corresponds to a sensitivity of 92.2% (95% CI, 91.3-93.5) and specificity of 96.9% (95% CI, 96.2-97.5) for detecting moderate or worse DR. To measure the level of agreement across the 5 classes, we used a quadratic weighted κ. Compared with the reference standard, on Aravind data, quadratic κ scores were 0.74 (95% CI, 0.71-0.76), 0.75 (95% CI, 0.72-0.79), and 0.85 (95% CI, 0.83-0.87) for the retinal specialist, trained grader, and new model, respectively. On Sankara data, quadratic weighted κ scores were 0.82 (95% CI, 0.80-0.84), 0.88 (95% CI, 0.86-0.89), and 0.91 (95% CI, 0.90-0.93) for the retinal specialist, trained grader, and new model, respectively (Table 3). Overall, the new agreement between the model and the adjudicated reference standard was higher than that of the individual graders.

Validation of an Improved Automated DR Grading System

During the course of this study, an improved model was published.16 This model was optimized for the 5-point ICDR grading, which allowed us to study model performance at each level of severity. On the combined data set, this corresponded to an AUC of 0.986 for the new model vs 0.974 on the old model for detecting referable DME. This corresponds to a sensitivity of 92.2% (95% CI, 91.3-93.5) and specificity of 96.9% (95% CI, 96.2-97.5) for detecting moderate or worse DR. To measure the level of agreement across the 5 classes, we used a quadratic weighted κ. Compared with the reference standard, on Aravind data, quadratic κ scores were 0.74 (95% CI, 0.71-0.76), 0.75 (95% CI, 0.72-0.79), and 0.85 (95% CI, 0.83-0.87) for the retinal specialist, trained grader, and new model, respectively. On Sankara data, quadratic weighted κ scores were 0.82 (95% CI, 0.80-0.84), 0.88 (95% CI, 0.86-0.89), and 0.91 (95% CI, 0.90-0.93) for the retinal specialist, trained grader, and new model, respectively (Table 3). Overall, the new agreement between the model and the adjudicated reference standard was higher than that of the individual graders.

Discussion

Our results demonstrate that an automated algorithm identified referable DR with performance equal to or exceeding the retinal specialists and trained graders in a prospective clinical setting. These results were consistent across 2 hospitals and suggests good model generalization. This was encouraging because the cameras used in the training data sets and prospective studies were different (the prospective data from Aravind and 94% of the data from Sankara were from Forus 3Nethra, and only 320 images [0.2%] in the development set were from this camera).

Because the reference standard, cameras, and clinical setting vary between previous studies, comparing this study with
Diabetic retinopathy severity and referable DME for Aravind (A and C) and Sankara Nethralaya (B and D). Diabetic retinopathy severity is greater than or equal to moderate nonproliferative DR. AUC indicates area under the curve. C.O., L.V., and S.S. refer to nonauthor technicians. R.R. refers to Dr Raman.
The algorithm was used in a process that was parallel to standard clinical care. More work must be done to study the integration of this system into the clinical care workflow. Given the high sensitivity of the system and specificity that is equal to human graders, the automated system holds promise as a point-of-care initial screening solution that does a first pass to rule out patients at lower risk of vision-threatening disease and flagging images that are categorized as abnormal for timely follow-up by a clinician. This will decrease the proportion of patients that might be lost to follow-up because of a failure to return the test results to the patient asynchronously (eg, the patient moved in the interim or does not have accurate contact information) or the need for repeated visits. This would be especially advantageous in low-resource settings. In higher-resourced settings, the algorithm could serve as a concurrent read with manual grading and the discrepant calls could be reviewed by an adjudicator. This could decrease the number of false-positive and false-negative results. The various implementation methods of the algorithm should be evaluated in future studies in the clinic. Finally, cost-effectiveness studies in high-resource and low-resource settings are critical in understanding the economic effects that such deep-learning algorithms will have on health care systems. These studies could inform not only the operating points (ie, referral thresholds) of the algorithms themselves but also subsequent care pathways downstream of the screening visit.

Conclusions

While there are many avenues for future work, this study demonstrates the feasibility of using an automated DR grading system in health care systems and shows that the trained algorithm generalizes to this prospective population of Indian patients.
Performance of a Deep-Learning Algorithm vs Manual Grading for Detecting Diabetic Retinopathy in India

Original Investigation Research

Raman, Peng, and Webster contributed equally to the accuracy of the data analysis. Drs Ramasamy, Raman, Peng, and Webster contributed equally to the writing of this article.

Concept and design: Gulshan, Wu, Kim, Raman, Corrado, Peng, Webster.

Acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data: Gulshan, Rajan, Widner, Wu, Wubbels, Rhodes, Whitehouse, Kim, Raman, Corrado, Peng, Webster.

Critical revision of the manuscript for important intellectual content: Gulshan, Rajan, Widner, Wubbels, Kim, Raman, Corrado, Peng, Webster.

Statistical analysis: Gulshan, Wu, Coram.

Obtained funding: Widner, Corrado, Webster.

Administrative, technical, or material support: Rajan, Widner, Wu, Wubbels, Rhodes, Whitehouse, Kim, Raman, Peng, Webster.

Supervision: Rajan, Kim, Raman, Corrado, Peng, Webster.

Conflict of Interest Disclosures: Drs Gulshan, Coram, Corrado, Peng, and Webster hold a patent for a mechanism through which to process fundus photography images using machine learning models pending. Drs Gulshan, Peng, Webster, Coram, and Widner; Messrs Wu, Wubbels, and Rhodes; and Messrs Whitehouse and Whitehouse reported being an employee of Google and owning Google stock. No other disclosures were reported.

Funding/Support: This study received funding from Google LLC.

Role of the Funder/Sponsor: Google LLC was involved in the design and conduct of the study; collection, management, analysis, and interpretation of the data; and preparation, review, or approval of the manuscript; and decision to submit the manuscript for publication.

Additional Contributions: We thank: Jonathan Krause, PhD, Yun Liu, Katy Blumer, BS, Bilson Campana, PhD, Anita Misra, BS, Philip Nelson, BS, Chris Stelton, MD, Ehsan Rahimy, MD, Anthony Joseph, MD, Oscar Kuruvilla, MD (Google Research), Florence Thong, MS, Sunny Virmani, MS, Shawn Xu, MS, Dave Watson, Eli Romanova, BS, Tom Stanis, BS, Linus Upson (Verykai Life Sciences), A. L. Sivarav, MPT, Sangeetha Sirinivasan, PhD, Gayathri Swaminathan, MSc, and Durgasi Jaishankar, BS (Aravind and Sankara) for the thoughtful advice, assistance in reviewing the manuscript, building tools to help with data gathering and analysis, and the execution of their contributions. They were compensated for their contributions.

REFERENCES