



The complete practitioner

As eye care practitioners, we all continue to learn throughout our careers to the benefit of our patients – the optometry degree/pre-registration year and also the ABDO Certificate in Contact Lens Practice (FBDO CL) are just the start. Contact lens opticians have the option of moving on to the ABDO Honours course and along with all BCLA members, can apply to become a BCLA Fellow, providing recognition of a member's esteem in the field. I feel it is critical that the College of Optometrists incorporates contact lenses into its new higher qualifications, to provide optometrists with a formalised route for recognition of superior contact lens clinical skills beyond the basic entry level. At the moment, it is too easy for optometrists to enter the profession lacking in contact lens confidence and succumb to pressure to drop contact lens work, unless they are based in a practice that recognises the importance of diversity within the optometrist's role.

Raising standards

The BCLA provides excellent education in contact lenses and the anterior eye, to increase the knowledge and practical skills of all eye care practitioners and give them confidence. We want to raise the standards among all practitioners by reaching out to those who aren't members and encouraging them to attend our workshops, lectures and the annual BCLA Conference – the largest clinical contact lens conference in the world. The conference is open to all, members and non-members, clinicians and non-clinicians, and offers multiple tracks of lectures, seminars and hands-on workshops. Highlights for June 6-9 2013 include Professor Eric Papas on overcoming the challenges of comfort with lenses and Professor Brian Tighe on the exciting developments in lens materials and a new business track.

One of the ways in which the BCLA tries to spread best practice throughout the profession is with patient information leaflets, in particular a new compliance checklist which practitioners fill in with the patient at each aftercare visit, to ensure that patients are fully aware of

Dr Catharine Chisholm comes to the role of BCLA president from both an academic and clinical angle. Here she explains her goals for the year ahead



Dr Catharine Chisholm: aiming to raise the standards of all eye care practitioners

all the latest guidance on lens care and wear. The recent story in the *Daily Mail* about a case of *Acanthamoeba* keratitis following swimming in lenses, only highlights the importance of regular, written re-enforcement of these matters.

Raising standards and growing the market are inextricably linked. This is reflected in the new BCLA mission statement: 'To educate, interact and promote growth within the field of contact lenses and related areas.'

Independent voice

I see growing the market as an evolution of our role and a realisation that the BCLA has an important part to play as an independent voice in educating both the practitioner and the consumer, to maximise success as far as contact lenses are concerned, which in turn will promote growth within the field. We want to be open about encouraging contact lens wear to patients and practitioners, and the fact that clinical expertise and remaining up to date is key in the age of internet sales. In addition, contact lens expertise allows you to offer your patients a complete clinical service and makes clinical practice more stimulating.

Growing the market means tackling the one third of contact lens patients who drop out of lens wear, a

proportion that is higher than in many other developed countries. They drop out because their needs are not being met. Admittedly some patients will always be a challenge but with the wide range of contact lens materials available these days it is much easier to satisfy patients by spending a little more time during an aftercare to trial a new lens and by communicating better with the patient. Poor compliance and rushed teaching of lens handling are also reasons for drop-out. Of course, improving a patient's experience of contact lenses relies on the patient attending for regular aftercare examinations and in the era of internet sales, this can be challenging. However, the internet is here to stay whether we like it or not and we have to adapt. It is essential for practitioners to convey the importance of regular aftercare at the lens fitting appointment, explaining its purpose and what is involved. This is a major objective of the BCLA as the increase in complication rates associated with infrequent or a complete lack of aftercare is to no one's advantage.

Exciting times

I am very proud of our conference and the other high quality events that the BCLA runs throughout the year. I am particularly proud of the success of the journal *Contact Lens and Anterior Eye*, which under Dr Shehzad Naroo has been awarded an excellent impact factor measure of citations, establishing it as the leading academic journal in the discipline of contact lens. These are exciting times for the contact lens field, with research culminating in clinically valuable developments in lens materials and myopia control in kids, among others. The way things are going, no eye care practitioner will be able to afford not to be fully up to date with respect to contact lenses. ●

● **Dr Catharine Chisholm** gives her Presidential Address entitled 'Life in the fast lane: contact lenses and driving' at the Royal Society of Medicine, 6.30pm Wednesday 19th September. 1 CET point. Register at www.bcla.org.uk