

**O**ptomety Tomorrow has evolved over the past decade from what was effectively a CET event tacked on to the College of Optometrists' AGM to a multi-strand education event held over two days with a major exhibition, research posters, renowned international speakers and a James Bond themed ball – complete with worryingly realistic gunfire!

As with all well organised conferences, much of the benefit is the opportunity to network with fellow professionals. There was much to be excited about this year with heady discussions over the new CET arrangements, the rumours about the withdrawal of Fluorets from sale, and private views for a select few of pre-Optrafair instrument launches.

There were six strands of education running concurrently over two days, with key lectures taking place alongside seminars and workshops. Plenty for the record 600 plus delegates to enjoy.

### Lectures

Myopia was a key theme this year. One of the first lectures concerned the 'Paradox of myopia', presented by **Dr Jeremy Guggenheim** (Hong Kong). Myopia has a significant genetic component and recent research advances have highlighted more than 20 'myopia-susceptibility' genes. However, the 'tsunami-like' rise in the prevalence of myopia afflicting parts of the Far East points very much to environmental influences that somehow interact with genes to result in myopic expression. Factors such as peripheral defocus and light exposure have all been studied, and where deliberate interventions are looked at, animal models are being used. Guggenheim emphasised that while these have obvious limitations (they are not human!), such studies add to our knowledge significantly.

The subject was again discussed on the second day in the George Giles Memorial Lecture, this year given by **Professor Mark Bullimore** (Houston). After completing his PhD at Aston some years ago, Bullimore moved to the US to become a key player in optometric education while still maintaining his UK links; he is on the editorial board of the College research journal. His focus this year was on efforts to slow myopic progression. Various techniques using rigid lenses and multifocals in children gave, in his words, 'mixed results'. Penalisation with atropine has shown more impact,

# Tomorrow's world

**Bill Harvey** and **Alison Ewbank** agree with the general consensus that this year's annual College of Optometrists Conference held last week was the best yet



but obviously presents significant risks of adverse effects to children during the treatment period. 'The most promising therapy is overnight orthokeratology which seems to retard axial elongation by 50 per cent.' Several delegates I discussed this with after the lecture seemed enthused enough to look into trying this out for themselves on return to their practices.

**Professor Yit Yang** (Wolverhampton) reminded delegates that a number of therapies for diabetic macular oedema, a significant cause of sight loss in the working age population, were showing promising outcomes. Anti-VEGF agents, intravitreal fluocinolone and micropulse laser treatment are all available and every community optometrist should become familiar with the appropriate pathway to allow patients to quickly access these when required.

### Fresh Eyes

The first Fresh Eyes conference for newly qualified practitioners, organised jointly with the Association of Optometrists, was a guide to becoming a fully paid-up member of the profession – how to avoid legal pitfalls, how to examine children's eyes and how to become a 'rock star optometrist'.

The one-day programme running alongside Optometry Tomorrow provided lectures and interactive workshops on clinical and commercial topics, all tailored to those starting out in optometry. The 60 delegates also had the chance to sample lectures on the main programme and attend social events. AOP head of professional development **Karen Sparrow** said the aim was to encourage those entering

the profession to use the skills acquired in their training to the full. Fresh Eyes provided them with an environment where they could feel comfortable taking part in discussion and get used to attending conferences. Delegates welcomed the opportunity to share their experiences in practice with other new recruits and to meet with friends.

### Seminars and workshops

The seminar and workshop sessions ranged from the very clinical, such as a case-driven discussion of anterior uveitis management by **Professor Martin Rubenstein** (Aston) and a review of blepharitis management by **Ian Cameron** (Edinburgh), to the commercial, such as a look at marketing strategies to boost practice growth by **Andy Clarke**.

As always, there were hands-on sessions, with, for example, **Dr Dan Rosser** (Norwich) offering a crash course in gonioscopy, and an autofluorescence seminar with **Daniel Hardiman-McCartney** (Cambridge).

DOCET ran a seminar session as a peer to peer discussion, with groups of delegates discussing two patients, each with headaches but of very different aetiology – one related to temporal arteritis, the other to a decompensated phoria. Early feedback suggested that as much was gained from understanding the new CET cycle processes as from the clinical management.

A brief snapshot such as this can never do such an event justice so I wholeheartedly recommend readers think about attending next year's event due to be held in York on March 15 and 16. ●



The event offered hands-on learning opportunities