

There is so much going on in the world of contact lenses. As I write this article, I am aware of several contact lens stories in the professional and consumer media, ranging from a new Australian study investigating myopia control in orthokeratology, to a US state's clampdown on the supply of plano cosmetic lenses, to the risk of infection to contact lens wearers in Yorkshire.

With its email news updates and alerts, website, and regular contact with the media, the BCLA has an important role in disseminating information on contact lenses for the benefit of its members, the wider contact lens community and the public, especially where safety issues are concerned.

With regard to the plano contact lens issue, it is the BCLA's intention to continue its campaign against a loophole we were promised would be addressed by the introduction of the Section 60 changes to the Opticians Act, only to find the new legislation had failed to outlaw the sale of plano lenses without a prescription.

It is frustrating to watch other countries around the world getting to grips with the danger that unregulated supply of these lenses poses to the ocular health of their citizens. The BCLA will continue to work with those in a position of influence to achieve the same level of control as we have for corrective lenses.

Education leader

While developing its role as an information provider, the BCLA is also the leading supplier of education in contact lenses and the anterior eye in the UK, and, increasingly, worldwide. Having celebrated our 30th anniversary last year, everyone involved in the BCLA over this period should be delighted with what has been achieved. Our association has grown from just 381 members in 1977 to more than 1,750 today, in nearly 40 countries around the world. Our annual Clinical Conference is now the world's largest contact lens meeting and an important international event.

One of my aims for my presidential year is to redouble our efforts to grow the membership of the association across all the disciplines that make up the fabric of our unique society. Like a majority of larger membership organisations, the BCLA cannot cover its costs through membership subscriptions alone and so relies heavily on other methods of revenue

30 years and more relevant than ever

The British Contact Lens Association continues to grow and offer more value and benefits to its members writes BCLA president **Nick Atkins**



generation in order to prosper.

In fact, membership currently represents fantastic value for money as the association continues to increase its subsidy of the annual subscription. This year we are delighted to provide yet another great benefit, with UK members getting a complimentary copy of the *ACLM Contact Lens Year Book* included in their subscription.

This year we will be carrying out a major review of our membership offering with a view to adding more new benefits and encouraging more practitioners both in the UK and overseas to appreciate that, for those who are serious about contact lenses, BCLA membership is a prerequisite.

Also new for 2008 is that BCLA membership will now be free of charge to all students in full-time education in the UK. Underlining our commitment to contact lens education, we recently appointed the first BCLA tutor under a pilot scheme for UK training institutions. The tutor's role will be to provide a contact lens teaching resource and act as an ambassador for the association. If successful, the scheme will be extended to other colleges and universities.

Fellowship benefits

One of the great benefits the BCLA has brought to its members in the last couple of years is a way of recognising esteem in and commitment to the contact lens field. BCLA Fellowship enables those who have dedicated time and effort to any aspect of the contact lens field to have that commitment recognised and to use the letters FBCLA.

I am personally proud to be a fellow of an association I have held in such

high esteem since first starting out in contact lens practice. While many well known individuals have stepped up and been awarded fellowship, others doing sterling work in academic and company research or fitting lenses on a daily basis have successfully applied. And don't think you have to remember PMMA lenses to be worthy of this award. Our youngest fellow is just 24 and demonstrated an enjoyment and commitment to contact lens fitting just as worthy of this honour as those more mature professionals.

The association wants to see more members from all disciplines in the contact lens and anterior eye field being awarded fellowship. The dedicated clinician seeing patients all day can achieve BCLA fellowship by submitting case histories from everyday practice. I would encourage those who have considered fellowship but are apprehensive of what is involved, particularly in the generation of case studies or the *viva voce* review, to attend our forthcoming courses, the first of which will be held in London in March.

From a personal point of view, serving as president of this august association is my proudest professional achievement and I am well aware of the high-calibre individuals who have passed through this office during our 30-year history (see page 20). I am sure they found, as I have, that the time flies by and there is so much that you want to do in so little time. I am delighted with how the BCLA continues to develop on a local and global scale and would urge all those involved in any aspect of contact lenses to support us as members so that the next 30 years can be just as successful. ●