

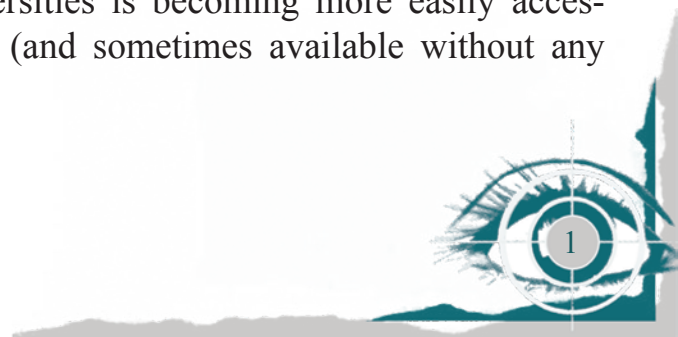
From the Editor's Desk

March 2010

This year is starting off with great promise and many opportunities for learning more about vision, the eye and optometry at several conferences that will take place during the current year. The Ophthalmological Society of South Africa (OSSA) has already held a very successful conference earlier this year and some optometrists were also present. Two or three academics from departments of optometry in South Africa presented talks at this conference and other optometrists were also present. It is, of course, very pleasing to see such interaction between the two professions and hopefully in the future co-operative activities will further expand - and this despite some of the recent difficulties in terms of potential changes to the scope of optometry that eventually could impact to a limited extent on ophthalmology. Very excitingly, we also have the soccer World Cup in less than 100 days and in Durban two conferences will take place during late September. One of these conferences (the *World Congress on Refractive Error*) mainly involves the complicated issues of uncompensated ametropia and effective eye care delivery. The second conference (the *World Conference on Optometric Education*) is mostly concerned with advancing optometric education in different parts of the world. The South African Optometric Association (SAOA) is also somewhat involved with these conferences in Durban and delegates from many countries in Africa and elsewhere

are likely to attend one or both of these meetings. So these conferences are wonderful opportunities to learn something new while also perhaps meeting and interacting with interesting people involved with vision and eye care. The Graduate Institute of Optometry (GIO) and the Binocular and Pediatric Vision Association (BPVA) are also hosting short meetings (of between two to four days) this year and incorporating speakers from other parts of the world. So clinicians and others in eye care and vision-related fields should definitely have ample opportunities in 2010 to hopefully learn some new skills and also acquire useful knowledge.

These days even the Internet, and its many web sites and online journals of vastly differing standards, are becoming very useful for finding information. Medical and other health-care practitioners are increasingly incorporating real-time computer and web-based or internet activities in their daily interactions with patients. Naturally, there is also an enormous amount of essentially useless information on the web but careful use of the internet certainly can assist with initial exploration of some areas or topics. Over time as more scientific material becomes available as digital and electronic documents, the internet will also become increasingly important. Already, excellent course material from many universities is becoming more easily accessible (and sometimes available without any



costs involved) via electronic media and that also will eventually make for a generally better educated and probably more-tolerant global society.

Indeed the volume of new scientific papers, even in relatively smaller fields of activity, is increasing at an almost unbelievable rate. (When one considers that China and India together probably produce 750 000 or more new engineers each year then the incredible potential for positive change and knowledge generation is clearly apparent. Amongst this number above there may be some that are more truly technicians with perhaps a more limited scope than an engineer but many are certainly engineers of a very good quality. Together these two countries represent only about one third of the world's population, and thus there are large numbers of engineers, scientists and health care professionals qualifying each year irrespective of economic, political and other problems that exist in some parts of the world.) Demonstrating also the volume of modern information content is that a simple search via a database such as Science Direct for something like papers on dry eye can yield many thousands of articles and it would be an impossible task to read more than a limited number of the ones that look more interesting. Even seemingly esoteric topics in optometry or ophthalmology may still have dozens of published papers available, most of which could easily be of a reasonably or even very

high quality. But this growth of information, while possibly a little intimidating, is also very exciting and much better obviously than the alternative of a lack of necessary information.

Of course, this abundance of information suggests that nowadays students possibly have a tougher time in obtaining their qualifications. But, they also have the important advantage of mostly being more knowledgeable and skilled because of their education today. For instance, optometric education in South Africa is almost certainly better these days than say 10 or 20 years ago and, no doubt, optometric graduates of twenty years from today will be even more competent and skilled individuals than might be the case now. Optometric students in the 21st Century also have the important advantage of greater exposure to modern technology and resources that was unavailable to students in past years and this also enhances their diagnostic skills and knowledge base. But there remains much room for further improvement and some of the changes to the scope of optometric practice, and greater clinical experience in different environments such as, for example, hospitals will also likely play a significant role in this regard.

Alan Rubin

Editor

Department of Optometry

University of Johannesburg

