

## From the Editor's Desk

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The educational gap between South African Optometry and some of the more developed parts of the world is expanding at an astonishing and almost alarming rate. In several parts of the world optometry is now a seven or eight year process with students first obtaining a full three years, Bachelor's degree in Science or, in the case of the University of Melbourne, biological or biosciences which include subject areas such as biomedical engineering. Thereafter students study optometry for a period of four years to obtain a Doctor of Optometry (OD) degree. In the USA optometrists have for numerous years followed a similar process where seven or eight years of post-school education is required and some optometrists in the USA are already doing refractive surgery or other medical procedures that would be regarded almost worldwide as purely ophthalmologic procedures. With such rapid growth and opportunities, optometry in the USA is also regarded as one of the most popular career choices for young people despite the very commercial and competitive environment within which optometry operates in that part of the world. In Britain and other parts of the developed world, multiple post-graduate specialities (for instance, in contact lenses or binocular vision or ocular disease and its treatment) can be undertaken and very sophisticated and highly-developed postgraduate courses are available - and some of these courses have been offered for many years already. In other parts of the world including Africa six year programmes in optometry leading to Doctor of Optometry degrees have been available for many years. Thus, significant progress is being achieved in advancing the duration and overall level of optometric education of undergraduates and also that of optometrists already in clinical practice.

In South Africa, and unfortunately other areas of the world, academics are increasingly being buried in an avalanche of mostly unnecessary, overly complicated and occasionally even absurd paper work and related matters. Recently I was sent over 500 pages of mostly unnecessary information about a potential promotion of someone to the position of lecturer. The same, and unfortunate, candidate was

also subjected to writing a 15-page document of pseudo-philosophical nonsense and I have had similar and, not too surprisingly, unsolicited material from other parts of the world that contained more than 1000 pages of sometimes unclear or illegible information for simple promotions! Indeed, nowadays, people at some universities in South Africa have to attend internal workshops to find out how to put together a host of what is essentially material that no-one, or at least no-one who is even vaguely sane, would actually read before a promotions committee sits to decide on whether or not the promotion should be awarded. Instead of academics focusing on developing their subject knowledge and improving their course content and striving towards doing, or at least attempting to do, quality research and concentrating upon similar academic matters increasingly academics at all levels are required to waste a huge amount of time and effort on what can at best be described as largely trivial issues, or issues that have been complicated to an almost absurd level.

To add to the pleasures of the modern South African academic the primary and secondary education of South African youngsters is, as we are all too aware, of a sometimes dubious quality. Indeed I'm sometimes amazed at the ability of students to rise above the levels of the inadequate secondary and sometimes inferior tertiary education to which they are subjected. Despite such limitations that are largely outside their control many students are often able to achieve things that are quite remarkable. But, in general, many universities in South Africa may need to seriously re-evaluate their priorities if they want to genuinely compete on an international platform in terms of quality of education and research output!

*Alan Rubin*

*Editor*

*Department of Optometry*

*University of Johannesburg*