

From the Editor's Desk

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The South African Optometrist has a very long and proud history and the journal has been around for more than 75 years. Over that time period, optometry has evolved from a relatively brief, part time qualification to a four year full time degree programme with the possibilities of further studies towards Masters and Doctoral degrees. Presently there are also other possibilities for post graduate qualifications in areas such as sports vision, community or public health and studies in yet other fields are probably on the close horizon. So, gradually there are various routes being created for those that want more of a clinical or practical direction of study rather than, say, more essentially or specifically research only. Indeed, in 2012 there are now quite a number of people in optometry with higher degrees - and, they are no longer such a rare breed and some optometric researchers or scientists are even rated with the National Research Foundation (NRF) of South Africa. This type of rating is extremely important to the academics and their host universities and various grants and other advantages can be obtained through such ratings which are also internationally accepted. Of the relatively small amount of South African scientists that are given the highest form of rating by the NRF, namely an A-rating, one Professor WF Harris is an optometrist and engineer who remains very active in optometric research, although he is no longer directly involved in lecturing to undergraduate optometry students. In other parts of the country, optometric researchers are also

developing and making important contributions to growth of optometry and to improved understanding of vision and of ocular function. At the same time there are discussions about expanding the scope of optometric practice in this country to include therapeutic modalities for eye disease and this is a move that will benefit the wider public and also enhance the potential contribution of optometry within eye and health care within South Africa. The process is a complicated one and, no doubt, these changes will still take a fair amount of time to properly implement but worldwide optometry is growing and changing very rapidly. The type of education that today's optometric graduate receives is very different and vastly improved when compared with that of even only five or ten years ago and young graduates are exposed to new ideas and to modern technology to an extent that would have been unimaginable to earlier generations of graduates. Clinical optometric practice is similarly advancing rapidly and many practitioners are already using highly sophisticated instruments such as optical coherence tomographers, wavefront aberrometers, corneal topographers or newer digital fundus cameras with autofluorescence images.

Journals such as *The South African Optometrist* have contributed markedly towards providing high quality continuing education to optometrists and assisting academics and post-graduates to develop their writing and research skills. South Africa, of course, has many obstacles to overcome towards further

development of a more comprehensive and stimulating research environment that is essential to producing better skilled academics and researchers who ultimately are vital for producing better educated and more highly skilled graduates and clinicians. Proper eye and health care for patients also is enhanced through this ongoing process and many exciting innovations are being brought into daily clinical practice to make optometrists more skilled and more productive. Over the next ten to twenty years the rate of change both in optometry and ophthalmology is likely to rapidly increase and so we can anticipate that the technology and procedures used not only by ophthalmologists but also by optometrists will advance at an absolutely amazing pace (see, for example, the May 2012 issue (volume 89(5)) of the journal *Optometry and Vision Science* for some almost unbelievable recent advances in imaging and measurement of the human eye¹). One innovation is adaptive optics scanning lasers that can be used to produce, almost incredible, *in vivo* high-resolution images of tiny foveal capillaries¹. So, the future is really quite promising not just for ophthalmology, but also for optometry and its specific contribution to vision and eye health will continue to grow thus creating many new and exciting opportunities for clinicians, academics and reserachers.

Alan Rubin

Editor

Department of Optometry

University of Johannesburg

Reference

1. AJ Adams (Editor). Imaging and measurement in the eye. *Opt Vis Sci* 2012 **89**(5) 519-817. [Special issue of the journal]