Now Vision

Hot on the heels of the College of Optometrists’ Optical Workforce Survey, which predicted that in five years’ time there may not be enough optometrists in the UK to meet the UK’s eye healthcare needs, along comes the Foresight Project—an epic investigation into the impact of technology on the optical sector over the next 15 years.

One of the fundamental projections of the Foresight Project, commissioned by the College and the Optical Confederation, is that the traditional model of High Street optical practice will cease to be viable by 2030. This will happen primarily because we’re living longer, patients are buying their products and services in a different way, testing and diagnostic procedures are becoming fully automated, and the local commissioning of NHS services is being overhauled.

Attending its launch in London last month, however, I was struck by the mood of optimism and enthusiasm to grasp the opportunities that will arise from this changing landscape. It is now up to the optical bodies to digest the findings of the report and discuss strategies to move the profession onwards and upwards. Read a review of the key findings of the Foresight Project on page 23, and let us know what you think.

In the context of technology and automation, your practice management system (PMS) is integral to your practice’s ability to keep pace with consumer behaviour and do business efficiently and seamlessly. In our special pull-out feature (pages 13-16), we hear from some NEG members reaping the benefits of Optinet’s flagship PMS, Optinet FLEX, and learn some top tips from Optinet’s Chris Smith and Chris Gray.

This month’s Product Spotlights are on Thea’s range of solutions and supplements for dry eye and blepharitis (pages 18-19) and Essilor’s new Eyezen lens inspired by the viewing habits of Gen Y (pages 20-21). If you missed Mido, then never fear because our fashion editor, Joan Grady, was there to bring back some eyewear inspiration for your practice in Style Spotlight. Enjoy.

Yours,
Nicky Collinson @eyestories
Editor
Vision Now
Optometric Fees Negotiating Committee

The government has frozen NHS sight test fees in England at 2015-16 levels for 2016-17. The CET grant, the grant to train pre-registration optometrists, and patient voucher values, however, will all increase by one per cent for 2016-17. Mike George, Optometric Fees Negotiating Committee (OFNC) chair, commented: “This is a heavy and extremely disappointing blow to a profession that has always supported and embraced reform and modernisation. It will be a bitter blow to many and we may see essential local services disappearing as a result.”

Chris Hunt, Optical Confederation (OC) chair, commented: “This is hard news for a loyal and dedicated workforce. Despite the best efforts of our sector negotiators, it seems that, once again, primary care and prevention are being punished for failures elsewhere in the system. As was entirely predictable, acute providers are now forecasting well over £2bn deficits this year and the Five Year Forward View is signally failing to move services out of hospitals at any scale and pace to address this. That is why we are right in pressing ahead with expanding services in the community in England where progress has been so slow.”

Optical Confederation

The minister of state for community and social care, the Rt Hon Alistair Burt MP, was guest of honour at the launch of the Foresight Project in London last month – a major piece of work examining the potential impact of technology on the optical sector to 2030. Commissioned by the Optical Confederation and the College of Optometrists, with funding provided by the Central Optical Fund, the Foresight Project focuses on UK demographics and worldwide technological development and their effects on behaviour, business models, education and regulation.

The knowledge gleaned from the research, undertaken in 2015 by the 2020Health think tank, is designed to inform debate as to how the sector can shape and adapt to the challenges and opportunities presented by the growth of digital technology and evolving demographics. Addressing guests at the launch, Alistair Burt MP said that expected changes would present challenges for education and regulation in the optical sector, and that technology must be about developing benefits for patients and not an end in itself. “I welcome the Foresight Project; we need to face the future head on,” he said, affirming that the Department of Health too was committed to new ways of working. “I am confident that the optical sector will lead on these changes and I commend the work being done. It shows real foresight,” he added. Turn to page 23 for an overview of the Foresight Project findings.

Dunelm Optical

Twenty new optical styles for women are now available in the Janet Reger collection from Dunelm. The range of high jointed frames from the celebrated lingerie designer brand are typically feminine, mixing slimline acetates with contemporary metal designs. Glamorous cats-eye styles in bold plastics sit alongside semi-rimless frames in a variety of sizes and jewel colours and embellishment. The intricate lace printed sides that echo Reger’s latest lingerie release juxtapose with coloured metals on frame JR4155 (pictured).

CooperVision

CooperVision has upgraded its free OptiExpert app with a new toric calculator. The new function suggests an initial diagnostic CooperVision toric contact lens for each patient after their most recent spectacle prescription is entered. The app also takes into consideration back vertex distance adjustment and on-eye orientation whilst supporting any refinement required, based on the practitioner’s observation of the toric axis location marker. Alongside the recent multifocal and toric calculator updates, the app’s original functionality converts the Efron Grading Scales into an easy-to-use digital tool. It allows practitioners to grade patients against 16 sets of images and covers the key anterior ocular complications of contact lens wear.

Rodenstock

Rodenstock ColorMatic IQ 2 are self-tinting lenses based on new dyes with a unique molecular structure. Debbie Bathgate, Rodenstock lens product manager, said: “New, attractive and very true colours together with even deeper tinting on hot days, and in the shade, make ColorMatic IQ 2 self-tinting lenses the ideal companion for everyday life. One lens ensures comfortable vision around the clock, both indoors and outdoors.” The new design colours are Pure Grey, Chocolate Brown and Racing Green.

“After being worn for a long time, the lenses continue to darken reliably, become lighter again and providing the wearer with perfect vision,” continued Debbie. “In addition, the molecular structure ensures outstanding colour stability – year after year. The new photochromic molecules are bigger and react more sensitively to UV light, which means the spectacle wearer experiences perfect tinting in the shade as well. They make it possible to have a darker tinting than before at higher temperatures, and provide the perfect balance between the degree of tinting, becoming lighter quickly and offering clarity indoors,” Debbie concluded.
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AIR OPTIX® has always offered your patients superior protection against irritating deposits¹. NOW combined with HydraGlyde® for longer-lasting moisture benefits²

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- Keeps lenses continuously moist throughout the day²


*For a limited period. Ask your eye care professional for complete wear, care and safety information.

GB/VC/AIR/03/16/0012 11419 © 2016 Novartis AG. AIR OPTIX, AIR OPTIX plus HydraGlyde, SMARTSHIELD, HydraGlyde and the Alcon logo are trademarks of Novartis AG.
Shamir has launched an advanced measuring device for clear or dark lenses that looks like a stylish tabletop mirror. Spark Mi is a camera, measuring tool and interface with the practice computer all rolled into one. The patient simply looks in the mirror wearing their chosen glasses and with one click, their image appears on the practice computer, along with their PD. All of the other required measurements come direct from the computer. An added advantage of Spark Mi is its ability to take measurements through dark-lensed sunglasses “just as quickly, easily and accurately as clear lenses”.

General Optical Council

The General Optical Council (GOC) has published the results an independent survey of more than 2,000 contact lens wearers, which found that 43 per cent of wearers saw contact lenses as a healthcare product, with just as many viewing them as a lifestyle product; 12 per cent saw them as a cosmetic product. Of the respondents, 77 per cent reported most frequently buying in practice compared with 21 per cent who most often bought online and two per cent from other sources. Forty-two per cent of those who bought online did so from a website linked with a High Street optician, with 35 per cent buying from an online-only store (the remainder did not know).

GOC director of strategy, Alistair Bridge, said: “The research reinforces the need for coordinated activity across the sector to ensure the public understands that contact lenses are a healthcare product and require diligent care. We want patients to receive and follow appropriate advice from their optician to ensure they are wearing their lenses safely and protecting their eyes.” The research is available on the GOC website at www.optical.org

Independents Day 2016

Proven Track Record (PTR) has announced that the theme of Independents Day (iDay) 2016 on Monday 7 November will be ‘How to be a retail champion’ — with independent retail guru, Clare Rayner, the keynote speaker. As previously reported, iDay 2016 will follow the NEG Conference on Sunday 6 November with both events being held at the Hilton Birmingham Metropole. An expanded iShow will run across the two days of both conferences.

“Clare Rayner is a business owner, retail expert, consumer champion, High Street campaigner and micro business backer,” said PTR managing director, Nick Atkins. “Her expertise has led to her becoming a popular and highly respected speaker and media commentator, sharing her knowledge on a wide range of retail and consumer topics. With the vast majority of independents relying on the bulk of their income being derived from retail product sales, we wanted to focus on being a successful optical retailer in this day and age.” Visit www.independentsday.co.uk

Eyespace

Eyespace has added a new acetate style to its collection for men, Jensen. Mirroring current consumer trends for retro-infused shapes and styling, combined with classic and contemporary texture and tones, model JN8014 is a minimal matt acetate with a slim silhouette. The frame features a logo branded trim detail, and the neutral colour palette consists of alabaster brown (C1) or smoke grey (C2).

Norville’s 6th edition Digital Lens Directory consists of 83 pages detailing a wide range of freeform progressives, bifocal, single vision and specialist HD lenses, such as up and down progressives or split bifocal and progressive combinations for users such as airline pilots, control technicians and surgeons i.e. anyone requiring both up and down near vision in one lens. Further new work on prism controlled freeform progressive and higher power blended edge designs is ongoing.

Frank Norville commented: “It gives us immense pride just to remind ourselves what a fantastic range of HD products the team have built up over just a short period and all made here in Gloucester. When you see freeform technology that enables us to make progressive lenses from 25mm to 100mm in uncut lens diameter and ultra-thin plus lenses no longer with dangerous ‘knife’ edges, it certainly brings a smile. Norville will continue to build up the confidence of UK opticians to prescribe British.” Call 01452 510321 or email sales@norville.co.uk for a copy of the directory.
To celebrate the forthcoming Euro 2016 football championships, Clearlab has launched a Football 2016 version of its Clearcolor Phantom cosmetic contact lenses in nine designs: England, Scotland, France, Spain, Italy, Germany, Belgium, Portugal and a football. “Clearcolor Phantom is our range of FDA and CE approved crazy contact lenses,” said Clearlab’s Dominique Gastaldi. “Our Special Invert Padding Technology prevents surface protrusion on the lens, keeping the eye safe from the colours. Our special design provides unparalleled user comfort, greater centration and premium optics.” The lenses, only available to eyecare professionals, come in two-monthly packs, and a choice of two point-of-sale posters.

Managing director of Brulimar, Howard Librae, said: “Dennis Taylor’s input in terms of design changes was invaluable in helping us produce what we believe to be the perfect snooker glasses.” Extra lens depth enables optimal viewing for snooker, billiard and crown green bowling players, regardless of the player’s head or eye position. All frames come with an authentic Dennis Taylor signature on the temples.

Contact lenses in children, dry eye management, ocular surface disease and aftercare techniques will come under the microscope at BCLA UK at the Belfry on 12-13 June. BCLA UK aims to give eyecare professionals the chance to learn more about contact lenses and anterior eye to ‘maximise their own potential’ and that of their practice. The conference will include a new session called Room 101 and lectures from experts including Dr Katherine Evans and Professors Lyndon Jones, Phil Morgan and James Wolffsohn.

Cheryl Donnelly, British Contact Lens Association (BCLA) chief executive, said: “We want to give UK eyecare practitioners more confidence when it comes to contact lenses and dry eye management. By laying on a series of high-profile lectures looking at some of the biggest topics in the contact lens industry we are giving delegates a fantastic opportunity to learn new skills which will last them a lifetime.” Delegates will have the chance to attend 10 guest lectures and take part in up to 12 workshops on both clinical and business skills. Four business streams on the second day cover myopia management and OCT use. Book at www.bcla.org.uk

Marchon Eyewear has renewed its global licensing agreement with Lacoste. Originally signed in 2011, the long-term extension of the licensing agreement grants Marchon the rights to design, produce and distribute Lacoste-branded sun and ophthalmic collections. Claudio Gottardi, president and CEO of Marchon Eyewear, commented: “We are extremely pleased to continue our successful partnership with Lacoste. As a leading brand within Marchon’s portfolio, we will continue our profitable collaboration for the development of high quality eyewear that is easily identifiable with the Lacoste heritage, along with special and innovative Made in Italy collections.”

The College of Optometrists has congratulated Cardiff University on being the first provider of the Professional Diploma in Glaucoma. The diploma, which lasts one academic year, aims to prepare optometrists to participate in community or hospital-based schemes and develop the required management skills for patients with glaucoma. Cardiff University is the first higher education institution to offer this specialist qualification.

The Professional Diploma in Glaucoma is part of a growing collection of higher qualifications developed by the College in order to enable optometrists to provide extended services in key areas such as low vision, contact lens practice and medical retina. Jackie Martin, director of education at the College of Optometrists, said: “It’s very exciting to be able to accredit the final level in the glaucoma higher qualifications and to meet the increasing demand from optometrists looking to develop in this field. We are also delighted to see such a high level of interest from others wishing to progress their careers by taking higher qualifications.”
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Delivering comfort to virtually every corrective need

Clariti® 1 day lenses allow 100% corneal oxygen consumption¹ to help maintain optimal ocular health and feature WetLoc™ technology for excellent all-day comfort.

Exceptional value for any lifestyle
Now you can upgrade your patients to the health advantages of silicone hydrogel daily disposable lenses.

Contact your Business Development Manager for more information.
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¹ Brennan NA. Beyond flux: total corneal oxygen consumption as an index of corneal oxygenation during contact lens wear. Optom Vis Sci 2005;82(6):467-472
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The new ultralight ProAct sports frame from Rodenstock features the company’s new Solitaire Red Sun 2 finish that protects against UV and infrared radiation, the latest innovation in the Solitaire family. The red mirror coating on ColorMatic IQ Sun 2 lenses also reduces the heat load on the eyes by reflecting infrared radiation, with contrast enhancing variations of Contrast Green, Contrast Brown and Contrast Orange.

While the basic curved models can be glazed up to +8/-8.00D, the inclinable hinges can be adjusted to the wearer’s head shape – even when the hinges are cold. The models with a top bar construction are ideal for golf.

Practitioners can order the four frames of the ProAct Intelligent Red Edition in a package. Rodenstock ColorMatic IQ Sun 2 and the Solitaire Red Sun 2 coating are integrated as standard.

The Contact Lens Opticians’ Professional Advancement Committee (CLOPAC) formed in 2015 will be holding its first event on 12-13 June alongside BCLA UK at the Belfry Hotel in the West Midlands. The event will be chaired by Andrew Price and will offer practical workshops in both corneal topography/ortho-K, pachymetry and Goldmann applanation tonometry, as well as an open discussion forum. Nick Atkins will also run workshops on punctual occlusion. The event, free to CLOPAC members, is sponsored by No7 Contact Lenses, with equipment on loan from Keeler. For information email clopac@outlook.com

Spring into spring with model 13358, one of three new frames styles from Menrad’s spring/summer optical collection. Inspired by the clear lines and colours of the latest fashion trends, the new designs were created to make every spectacle wearer look ‘perfect’. Pink is a popular colour this season, and model 13358 is available in pink/salmon (pictured), purple/blue and grey/green.

Essilor International has acquired the Vision Direct Group, one of Europe’s leading online contact lens retailers with a revenue of around £33m in 2015. Vision Direct does the majority of its business in the UK and Ireland, but is also active in several other European countries. In a statement, Essilor International said the move further strengthened its current positions in online optical retail in Europe, by complementing existing activities in the Nordic countries. Vision Direct’s existing management team will remain in place.

In a new study conducted by Optegra, 54 per cent of respondents admitted to having previously lied to their optician regarding their eye health and the standard of their vision. Furthermore, researchers found that nearly one in 10 respondents did so because of their desire to wear glasses despite not requiring them. Researchers polled 1,912 UK-based adults aged 18 and over; each participant revealed that they had attended an appointment with their optician within the past 12 months. Researchers asked all participants whether they had ever ‘guessed’ what to say during an eye exam, even if their eyes could not determine the right or wrong answer, and more than three quarters (76 per cent) admitted they had done so.

The Directorate of Optometric Continuing Education and Training (DOCET) has relaunched its website offering bite-sized CET programmes, as well as new personalised accounts so that users can keep track of their DOCET activity. Other features include an easy-to-search comprehensive audio/visual reference library covering key topics and conditions. Visit www.docet.info
The sight loss charity SeeAbility has been awarded a £308,976 Department of Health grant towards its Children in Focus project. The sum is part of nearly £9m that will be handed out to the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector over the next three years. SeeAbility successfully applied to the Innovation, Excellence and Strategic Development Fund (IESD) for support in transforming eyecare for children who attend special schools.

The charity, which supports people with sight loss and multiple disabilities, will use the grant to scale up their sight testing work, as they seek to establish a robust eyecare system for children with learning disabilities across England. “We are delighted to have been awarded the grant that will help us deliver more specialist sight tests in more special schools around the country,” said Paula Spinks-Chamberlain, SeeAbility’s director of external affairs. “Each specialist sight test we carry out costs over £85 and financial support like this enables us to reach more children.”

The College of Optometrists has created an infographic to help sufferers identify when they are most at risk of developing symptoms of hay fever, and take appropriate medication to minimise their allergy. The infographic, available at www.lookafteryoureyes.org, shows the peak season for each of three pollen types in a calendar. The College is urging those with hay fever to identify which pollen triggers their hay fever and then consult the infographic to predict the timeframe in which they are likely to be most sensitive. Doing so will enable them to take the most appropriate medication at an earlier stage.

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A change in legislation means that orthoptists will now be able to train to supply and administer a limited list of eye medicines without the need for an exemption. Under current medicines legislation, orthoptists can already supply and administer medicines to some patients via other mechanisms. However, the restrictions attached to the current arrangements can prevent patients getting the medicines they need, when they need them, according to the British and Irish Orthoptic Society (BIOS).

Rowena McNamara, BIOS chair, explained: “We are very pleased that we have achieved this professional milestone. It means that we can offer patients continuity of care with one practitioner, arrange fewer visits and can reduce the delays for people waiting for treatment at eye clinics. We hope that patients will experience the difference by the end of 2017. We also hope that all professionals involved with the treatment of patients in the eye health team will be pleased with the development, and that we can negotiate ways to implement the new entitlement that orthoptists will have for the benefit of patients and to better use scarce NHS resources,” Rowena added.

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Clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) are being urged to introduce more High Street eye healthcare services following revelations that hospital ophthalmology services are at bursting point. The call follows the announcement by the UK’s leading ophthalmologist that patients are at risk of irreversible sight loss because NHS eye clinics can’t cope. Professor Carrie MacEwan, president of the Royal College of Ophthalmologists, said follow-up appointments can be “delayed by years”, meaning patients don’t get treated on time.

“We are already supporting optometrists in a number of areas to work with ophthalmologists in Acute Trusts on initiatives to help address capacity problems. But we need all CCGs to put patients’ sight at the top of their health agenda and commission appropriate local services to ease severe bottlenecks. There are over 10,000 optometrists in High Streets across England that can be utilised to monitor low-risk patients in the community. Local studies show that on average, this could take up to one third of patients at risk off waiting lists and allow ophthalmologists to concentrate on the most urgent cases and follow-up appointments.”

The community optical sector also urged the NHS to connect optical practices to its IT systems, such as e-Referral Service, to ensure integrated patient care. “For too long, optical practices have been overlooked as part of delivering a reformed and preventative NHS. But optical professionals have the skills and locations and the determination to play a part in delivering better eye health and reduce levels of preventable blindness. CCGs need to wake up to this and realise community services are a cost-effective solution,” added Katrina.

An Independent View

Rocking the boat

Optics in the UK is facing a number of challenges over the coming months and years. At the centre of these challenges is the ever-present tension between delivering clinical excellence, and driving the profits for shareholders of optical product providers and retailers. Independent practices have arguably been at the receiving end of the many changes that have impacted on the world of optics over recent years, and many feel frustrated that a number of those changes have not been to the benefit of eye health in general.

So what’s next? Following a debate in the House of Lords, it is clear that there are commercial interests that would like amendments to be made to the Opticians Act, opening up the whole ‘can of worms’ that any review of the primary legislation might occasion. Further, with the online provision of basic optical products gathering momentum, the multiple retailers on the High Street are seeking to travel the value curve of offering what have been termed ‘enhanced optical services’.

So what has this to do with ‘rocking the boat’? Well, if the changes that have been descended upon the profession of optometry for many years represent commercial interests ‘rocking the boat’ for independents, the AIO is about to start ‘rocking the boat’ with a change initiative of its own.

For more than a year, the Association has been working on the introduction of a Code of Conduct for Independent Practices designed to help the public and the wider medical profession identify existing providers of clinical excellence in eyecare. The Independents Code (or IC as it will be known), has demanding provisions, which subscribers will sign up to and will be regulated by a new body called the IC Oversight Board.

The code will help the general public understand the difference between being treated like a patient (and having a long-term clinical relationship with an optometrist), or simply as a consumer going shopping for spectacles. Over time, it will become the standard by which the best available eyecare on the High Street will be identified.

The AIO launched the IC at Optafair in Birmingham and a number of practices signed up to subscribe to the Code. They will form part of the Pioneer Group of the first 50 practices to sign up who will benefit from a discount on the IC subscription for the first year. To find out more call 0800 1300 486 or email admin@aiovision.org.uk
A clearer way to manage

For further information and to book your no obligation, in practice demonstration please call 0845 3130233 or email sales@optinetuk.com
Optinet has been providing software systems to independent opticians of all sizes for almost 30 years. “Our aim is simple – provide high quality products and services to all of our customers in a friendly and professional manner,” says Chris Smith, Optinet UK sales manager. “We believe software has to continuously evolve. Keeping pace with technology, forging new partnerships with key optical providers and listening to what our customers have to say is how we do this.”

At the forefront of this drive to keep pace with technological developments and changing consumer behaviour is Optinet’s flagship product, Optinet FLEX. “The FLEX practice management system is a package written from the ‘ground-up’ – drawing on our experiences with hundreds of independent opticians spanning 25 years,” explains Chris.

FLEX is designed to benefit the practice in the following key areas:

- Patient record management
- Clinical record keeping
- Loyalty scheme management
- Dispense
- Till
- Stock management
- Appointment diary
- Business intelligence

FLEX also has something to offer all members of the practice team:

- Administration staff are given instant access to the patient data they need to help patients (i.e. FTA rate/spend indicator/NHS entitlements and recall dates)
- Dispensing staff can easily create and track orders from dispense through to collection with the ability to schedule automated follow-ups by email or SMS
- Optometrists have access to full clinical records and the ability to personalise the clinical assessment record, allowing them to work the way they want
- Practice managers and business owners have easy access to the information they need to make important business decisions; from dashboards containing key performance data through to a library of built-in popular searches allowing targeted marketing campaigns to be created and sent via email, letter or SMS

As no two businesses are identical, FLEX has been designed with flexibility in mind. It can be used by a single consulting room practice or a multi-location business. “Whether you have a single practice that wants to save money by switching from traditional recall letters to email and SMS, or you own a group looking to centralise and share business data, FLEX has something to offer you,” Chris adds.

To diminish the hassle of switching software provider, Optinet has converted data from all of the major PMS providers, avoiding the laborious task of re-entering patient data. Optinet also offers customers access to Optisave, its secure, automated back-up and data validation service. “Optisave provides the peace of mind that your critical practice data is being safely backed up and checked weekly by Optinet support staff,” Chris explains.

Journey to a paperless practice

Daniel and Judith Searle of BR James Opticians began their journey with
Optinet some 12 years ago: “For many years we successfully used the basic system—patient details, prescriptions and recall system. We then decided to change over to Optinet FLEX in August 2014. It was a completely new system, so everyone had to learn how it worked.

“It did take a few days for the data to transfer over to FLEX, which went through fairly smoothly and Chris Gray from Optinet spent two days in practice training all the staff how to use the new software. Like any change, it does get a bit frustrating, but Chris was excellent and very patient, and now we are used to the new system it works really well. The help desk team are always available and very supportive.”

The practice’s first priority was to get the clinical records completed on the computer. This was a complete change for the optometrists but we got there remarkably easily,” Judith continues. “With this challenge, complete clinical governance became much easier—so no more trying to decipher hand writing. We then invested in a scanner and started scanning in clinical information to fulfil our quest to have completely paper free patient records. “Up until now, we had cashed up manually so putting it on the computer meant that the business intelligence produced reports much more easily. Our current project is the contact lens module. This is proving a bit more tricky, as the variety of options needed for contact lenses is greater, but we are ploughing on.

“In general FLEX is a superb practice management system that will cover every aspect of your working practice. It will even produce some pretty fancy reports and give you your key performance indicators. If you want to look into increasing your business, this would really impress the more business minded practices. It is a live system so if there are some changes you feel would help, there is the option of asking for a system request,” Judith adds.

**Setting themselves apart**

Bennett & Rogers’ small group of four practices in Devon recently upgraded from Optinet to Optinet FLEX. Owner and dispensing optician, Lloyd Bennett, says: “Whilst the old system served us well for more years than I can remember, we needed more.

“The electronic diary has been a great boon, as from any computer we can now check how well booked any practice is so there’s no more phoning around. We probably haven’t yet scratched the surface of FLEX’s management information function but already we have far more information on product sold, conversion rates and individual dispensing optician and optometrist effectivity.”

Bennett & Rogers operate its system via a remote server. “Unfortunately internet and broadband speeds are poor in our area,” says Lloyd. “Although FLEX was very slow initially, Optinet and IT Drive have worked on this and we are now experiencing very acceptable upload times. This should further improve with fibre optics, coming to us soon.

“We are glad we made the change; it’s not all been plain sailing and we realise we will only get the best out of FLEX if we put the appropriate amount of time in ourselves. No two opticians run their businesses the same way and we have worked with Optinet and its programmers to adapt the system to suit our requirements. I must say their genuine concern to get it ‘right’ for us and their approachability has been first class,” adds Lloyd.

**Moving with the times**

“Having moved from a 100 per cent paper based practice in April 2015, I can honestly say we would not return to the 19th century,” says Ivan Wainer of Hawkes & Wainer. “From the initial install and staff training through to the ongoing support and trouble-shooting, all the team at Optinet have been outstanding in their care and attention to detail.

“We run seven stations in a busy City of London practice and all the staff have found the system to be very user friendly and intuitive. Looking ahead to the near future, we plan to use more and more of the packages Optinet FLEX has to offer. We have no hesitation in recommending Optinet FLEX,” adds Ivan.
Spotlight on data mining by Chris Gray, Optinet training manager

Whilst much of my time in the field is taken up conducting initial user training (we provide one and a half days’ initial user training at no charge), I am increasingly visiting sites to conduct further management training, helping our clients make the most of the Business Intelligence tools included in our software.

The Business Intelligence section of FLEX is a powerful managerial tool, offering critical key performance data reflecting every stage of the patient journey. Reports for preset or bespoke date ranges give key information in a clear, concise format, whilst the Dashboards offer a graphical representation of practice performance at a glance. Tailored once again around the patient journey, key information such as optometrist conversion ratios, dispensing analysis and average patient spend are all available, mapped by staff member and around the same time period the previous year if relevant.

The Data Mining section offers an unrivalled library of searches generated from our 25 years at the forefront of serving independent opticians, from patient return rates to appointment attendance ratios and even mapping facilities, so you can even see where your best patients live. The powerful built-in tools allow you to email, text or call patients, or export the data in a clear, coherent format to dedicated CRM software.

The key performance indicators (KPIs) also give an at-a-glance view of how your business and staff are performing, and together all of these tools give an excellent overview of your practice or practices – as FLEX is ideal in a multi-branch set-up.

All of these product features come with the service which my colleagues and I provide. After visiting you for a day and a half of dedicated on-site training, which includes a managerial overview, we are always at the end of the phone or an email to discuss and analyse your data. As a practice, you will also benefit from the extensive experience that we have as a company and the continual updates we make to our product, which are particularly prevalent in the Business Intelligence module.

Some of our sites have now had FLEX for over two years and make the most of increased patient retention, cost-effective recalls and the simple automation that FLEX offers to always keep your practice in the front of your patients’ minds.

Spotlight on clinical records by Chris Smith, Optinet UK sales manager

I visit lots of practices demonstrating the FLEX software and discussing with business owners and staff how FLEX will help their business and how it fits into each part of the patient journey. There has been a noticeable shift in attitude in recent years to the idea of storing clinical records electronically, and what was once thought of as too time consuming is now becoming more commonplace. The reasons are different for each practice; the need to reclaim valuable floor space, not wanting to ‘interpret’ hand-written findings or it could be borne out of necessity such as submitting GOS forms electronically.

On-screen the FLEX clinical records are divided into handy tabs making it easy to find the information you need; patient medication, clinical assessments, refraction, IOPs, referral, drawings, billing and recall data all add up to a single comprehensive clinical record. One of the most popular features is the ability to create and tailor clinical assessments to the needs of the practice or practitioner. FLEX gives you complete control over the procedures you want to include in an assessment as well as the ‘quick-pick’ results that can be quickly dragged in.

Multiple refractions can be saved in one record and a refraction can be pulled from a previous examination or the pre-exam screen. Optometrists are in control of billing for their time as FLEX lets them choose what charges should be made, but don’t worry as even if they do nothing FLEX will automatically raise a bill for the NHS sight test or private examination fee. All of these features add up to a smart, easy-to-use clinical system with comprehensive, easy-to-read records.

Whatever the reasons, more practices use clinical records now than ever before. In the past two years, 40 NEG members have trialled FLEX as part of a free trial offer (see below). Of those who trialled FLEX, more than half took clinical records from day one and all practices who embarked on the trial have continued to use FLEX once the trial ended.

NEG special offer

NEG members can benefit from an exclusive offer to trial FLEX for 12 months at no cost. At the end of the trial period, members choose whether to continue with FLEX. If you would like to find out more about the FLEX practice management system or would like a free, no obligation demonstration, telephone 0845 315 0233 or email sales@optinetuk.com. You can also find out more at www.optinetuk.com. Or why not ask other members for their opinion on the NEG Forum.
Developing thoughts

Phil Mullins

BE LIKE STAN...HAVE A PLAN

IF YOU DON'T HAVE A BUSINESS PLAN YOU COULD FIND YOURSELF UP THE CREEK WITHOUT A PROVERBIAL PADDLE

My Grannie used to say: “Live life, you’re never sure when you'll be hit by a bus”, which is a cheerful thought. But of course she was saying, you don’t know what is in the future so make the most of today. This is great to a certain point, but in business this can be dangerous. Often we are so busy with what we are doing today or the next day, that we lose sight of what we are doing, why we are doing it and what we want to be doing.

Over the years, I have heard many practice owners say: “We don’t need to advertise, our diary is always full for at least four weeks”. But ask yourself, will this always be the case? What happens if it’s not? Obviously we don’t have a crystal ball to tell us what’s coming our way, but as a business we need short-term plans for six months, 12 months up to two years, then medium-term goals for two to five years and then long-term for five to 10 years. Of course, the short-term plans need to be very precise, with medium to long-term being more open and more of an overview.

Where to start

If you don’t currently have a business plan, where do you start? Firstly, look at where you are now: what does your business offer both customers and you? Do you have a strong ethos or a real mission statement, which I know sounds like it just comes from a marketing book, but it is very important to know if you’re in the right place now. You need to look from the outside in; if you were someone coming to the practice for the first time, what would you see and do you like what you see? It’s always worth looking at other businesses in your town, not just opticians, but shops, hotels, sports clubs and schools. Look at your demographic and importantly where the demographic is moving. Birth rate, immigration and an ageing population can seriously change who your target customers will be in the next 10 years.

Next look at the industry and how it has affected your business. Over the last 10 to 20 years, we have seen massive changes. Multiples have grown faster than ever before, supermarkets have got involved in optics and the internet has become an uncontrollable monster. But by looking at what has happened, you can start to work on what is going to happen. We all know that the retail side of our industry is going to increase, but what about the clinical side? The multiples are investing heavily in consulting room equipment and are looking to offer more clinical elements. This is to enable themselves to move away from the supermarkets and internet and into a more profitable part of optics. But where does that leave your business?

Digging further down

So having looked at where you are, how the industry has changed and where it might be heading, you can start to formulate your own plans (remember: doing nothing isn’t an option, because if you’re not moving forwards, you are going backwards as everyone else flies by). So in the short-term, six to 12 months, your goal could be to get more training for staff, change your frame profile and start to introduce more clinical services, such as OCT or dry eye clinics. In the medium-term (two to five years) you could be aiming for a practice refit or even thinking about moving to better premises. Then in the long-term, you could be adding more practices to the business, doubling your turnover or even implementing a succession plan for retirement, which should take at least 10 years to plan and fulfil. So now you have your goals laid out, what next?

Some years ago, I had the privilege of interviewing Sir Steve Redgrave, who is probably the most focused person I have ever met. He explained that between his fourth and fifth gold, the team worked out that they needed to improve their time by so many seconds. They then looked at how many training sessions they had and worked out that they needed to improve by 100th of a second every session, which in the grand scheme of things is nothing. It’s the same with business: work out where you’re going and then cut the journey into small pieces.

Take changing the practice frame profile, a short-term goal. First look at the demographic you want to attract, then source your first range to attract them, then target these people with what you’ve bought. Now this sounds simple, but you might have to update your PMS software so you can filter information and improve your communications. You might have to buy demographic data, so you can find new patients to target who would buy the new range. But each step needs to be laid out and then taken, to get you nearer your set goal.

So who needs a crystal ball? Some blue sky thinking, a lot of planning and sticking to your convictions and you’ll know what the future holds for your business – success!
SUPPORTING EYE HEALTH

Part 1: finding what really works for dry eye patients

Dry eye specialist Vincent Roberts explains how he is using Thea Pharmaceuticals’ product range to improve his services to patients

My name is Vincent Roberts and I’ve been in practice for more than 35 years and an independent for 25 of those in partnership with my wife Pat, a dispensing optician. We have built a busy and successful practice from scratch, and pride ourselves on patient care. We are always listening to our patients and aim to provide a service, which embraces best practice so that they enjoy excellent eye health.

I have become very interested in dry eye and its treatment and will regularly treat 15 to 20 patients a week within the spectrum of the condition. Although the demographic of our practice is biased to the over 60s, I see many younger patients with dry eye issues often associated with the use of computers or simply environmental. Five years ago, I started stocking some new products for dry eyes from Thea Pharmaceuticals. I must admit I was sceptical that these products would do little to help. How wrong I was…

Life changes and loyalty

Taking new products into the practice often brings fresh ideas and it motivated me to question patients more closely about their symptoms associated with dry eyes, and also to involve my staff. Thea Pharmaceuticals provided product and Ocular Hygiene training for everyone in the practice, and my new interest led to a better understanding of the condition, particularly the role that blepharitis plays in dry eye. This, in turn, made me realise how much better I could help patients deal with the daily misery some of them were enduring.

It’s no exaggeration to say that for some patients, effectively managing their dry eyes has been life changing, resulting in a solid, continuing relationship between them and me, which is something spectacles, etc, have never done. The loyalty and recommendations that have followed this have been very positive for my practice. I have also witnessed my staff enjoying learning and playing their part in this success; they play a vital supporting role in explaining to patients how to use the products properly. An indirect result of this success story has been that my practice has also become much more open to new ideas and products.

It’s a sad reality that, as a profession, we can often be looked upon as third in line after doctors and pharmacists for advice about eye problems. Perhaps this is because our windows rarely, if ever, promote eye health. In contrast, community pharmacies provide health education on several topics. To remain successful in independent community practice, we need to sharpen our focus on this and take time to educate our patients that we have the skills they need to deal easily with many eye problems. Dry eye is one of the most common eye conditions we see, and a good example of where we could demonstrate such expertise.

Involving staff in the process

The products I currently use are all free from preservatives, which is in line with the current expert thinking in managing dry eye. It is widely documented that chronic use of eye drops containing preservatives can be toxic for the eye’s surface, which is a major concern to me when dealing with chronic conditions such as blepharitis and dry eye.

Finding products that work is one thing, but getting patients to adhere to your advice is another. Compliance is a major issue when recommending something new to my patients. Thea’s Eye Health Regime Pad has been invaluable here. As I now have members of staff trained in ocular hygiene, I don’t need to take up valuable chair time explaining how to use the products recommended. I simply fill in the tear off pad and pass it to one of my team. This is personalised according to the patient’s needs and directed by me in the handover, therefore, the patient tends to take this seriously and follows the instructions step by step.
**Products of first choice**

For blepharitis, I use the family of Blepha products to ensure lids are kept clean. They are pharmaceutical grade products that don’t rely on soap for cleaning; they are formulated by dermatologists and tested by ophthalmologists. Patients find them easy to use as there is no need to rinse, and even patients with sensitive skin and/or eyes seem to get on well with this range.

My first choice in dry eye drops is Thealoz Duo. Not only is it preservative free in a multi-dose bottle that is easy to squeeze, it has a unique combination of two ingredients – Hyaluronic acid for great hydration and Trehalose to protect the surface cells of the eye. There is also a liquid gel version in single dose vials for extra comfort or overnight use for extra long-lasting relief.

One of my patients, Rose Cullen, 67, who has suffered from dry eyes for around three years, had used other drops for a year and whilst being comfortable found they did not last very long. I recommended that she tried Thealoz Duo. Rose has been using Thealoz Duo for over a year now and finds the long-term benefits are brilliant. She says: “The drops are very soothing, with less grittiness and redness of the eyes. I use the drops less frequently than others I have tried as the comfort lasts much longer.”

**An alternative to drops**

On some occasions, I have patients who never get the hang of putting a drop in their eye, or are too busy or in some instances simply need more comfort than drops alone. In cases like these I recommend Hyabak Caps, a dietary supplement from Thea, specifically designed for dry eye. It contains essential fatty acids, vitamins and minerals to reduce dry eye symptoms. Clinical evidence suggests patients can feel the benefit after just one month, but this does depend on the patient’s baseline nutritional status. Indeed, I have had instances where the patient has found an improvement in a couple of weeks.

It is easy to become focused on sight care as spectacles and contact lenses and, in a busy practice with targets to meet, that’s no surprise. We have a duty to our patients to listen carefully to their demands and these are often related to physical discomfort of the eyes impacting on sight. Good advice on eye health should be a part of every consultation and this may lead to lifestyle changes for the patient that leaves a more lasting impression of you than specs or contacts ever could.

To find out more about Thea and its products, email thea.support@theapharma.co.uk
Back in 2005, smartphones, tablets, e-readers, etc., didn’t exist. Ten years later, smartphones and tablets have sold in their millions and technology is now part of our everyday lives. Whatever our activities are, work or leisure, we are always connected. As our lives are now much more dependent on digital devices, our visual behaviour has changed too. When we used to read books, our reading distance was fairly constant, at 40cm and the printed characters easy to read.

Today, however, the screens we look at are much smaller and the characters are pixelated. Our eyes have to keep adjusting to different distances, whether we’re looking at a computer screen, tablet or smartphone. This has an impact on our overall visual comfort as our eyes also have to adjust more intensively and repeatedly and they endure screen glare too. From a study conducted by Essilor, it was revealed that when using digital devices, wearers not only adopted different postures, they also had a higher eye declination when using smartphones or tablets. The distance can vary from 33cm for a smartphone to as much as 1.40m for a TV.

A follow up study conducted with 4,000 people also considered digital device usage. The results found that more than 90 per cent of 20-65-year-olds use digital devices on a daily basis with an average of four different digital devices being used; 64 per cent spend more than four hours every day on a computer and nine out of 10 people spend more now on digital devices than they did two years ago. Even more interestingly, two out of three wearers felt that with digital screens their eyes required additional effort to see well. Three out of four suffered from tired, itchy or dry eyes and 70 per cent complained about neck and shoulder pain.

From these studies, Essilor categorised consumers into three consumer profiles:

- Young adults, 20 to 34-year-olds
- Pre-presbyopes, 35 to 44-year-olds
- Emerging presbyopes, 45 to 50-year-olds

The studies confirmed that all three groups experienced some form of discomfort but at different levels. Young adults suffered more from the screen brightness whereas emerging presbyopes had more difficulty with reading small pixelated characters.

A new solution for connected lives

Upon completion of the studies, and with new learnings, Essilor invested in research and development to create a new innovation to meet the needs of today’s digitally connected consumer. This new innovation is called Essilor Eyezen and the lens launches this month in the UK and Ireland. This new category of lenses is an alternative to single vision and provides the optimal solution for digital device users and, in particular, for the millennial generation (sometimes known as Generation Y, meaning people aged between 18 and 34).

The millennial generation spend a large proportion of their time looking at digital screens and have experienced some negative effects such as eye fatigue, trouble sleeping and headaches on a regular basis. However, this generation doesn’t really consider their eye health until they experience a problem.

Millennials view and interact with the world differently to earlier generations. More than other age groups, their digital devices are an integral part of their lifestyle both at home and at work. They are accustomed to using the internet as a ‘go to’ place for daily knowledge. Their amount of usage has created visual demands that their eyes aren’t used to dealing with. However, help is now at hand. Eyezen lenses serve as an everyday pair of spectacles providing comfort and protection for this generation of people.

The Eyezen Focus

The Eyezen Focus delivers extra power in the lower part of the lens to support the repeated and intensive eye focus efforts required for digital usage. The designs consider the physiological needs of each age group and match the natural eye declination and convergence when using digital devices. Each optimisation combines two elements: the drop in accommodation power after sustained close work; and the objective amplitude of accommodation as a function of age. This ensures that each age group gets the support required.

There are three unique Eyezen lens designs available and the patient’s age will determine which design is suitable for them:

- Essilor Eyezen initial 0.40D – for patients aged 20 to 34
To maximise protection and to promote healthy eyes, Eyezen comes with Crizal Prevencia as standard and with options for clear and Transitions. For those consumers who want to have a further level of personalisation, the lenses also come with Eyecode, which is available from practitioners who have invested in Essilor’s Visioffice technology.

There is a real need to educate consumers on the visual effects that can be encountered with prolonged use of digital screens. This generation needs encouragement to think about their eye health and how to take precautions before problems arise. It’s a great opportunity for independent ECPs to differentiate their practices on the High Street, to attract new, younger patients and to promote the importance of the eye examination.

Marketing and promotion

To assist ECPs in promoting Eyezen lenses, Essilor has built a comprehensive marketing programme around the product and will be using its social media networks to introduce ‘The FOBOs’ (FOBO meaning ‘Fear of Being Offline’). The FOBOs are a series of four short comedy movies showing a group of young people interacting in different situations where there is no connectivity for their phones or computer. These fun movies can be downloaded from Essilor’s B2B website at www.essilorpro.co.uk for practitioners to use on their own websites or social media platforms.

For ECPs who wish to advertise Eyezen within the practice, there is a range of point-of-sale materials available, all of which are free of charge. The practice support material includes posters, window cubes and a dispensing mat. As part of Essilor’s business partner programme, personalised marketing support is also available.

Operating from Essilor’s Thornbury headquarters, a specialist trade marketing team are on hand to advise on and produce personalised marketing materials for independents (including artwork and printed materials). The service offers a fantastic benefit to ECPs who don’t have their own in-house marketing team. They can use purchasing powers to buy media such as radio advertising, press advertising, billboards, leaflet drops and other forms of OOH (Out of Home) advertising.

They also work with external suppliers for creating and fitting contravision window displays, which are very impactful and ideal for those who wish to create an impact in their local vicinity. Payment for marketing services can be made through customer accounts or by using VLS points, which are obtained through loyalty programme membership.

Consumer guarantee

Essilor is so confident that Eyezen lenses will be the new standard that the product is covered by a Satisfied or Exchanged guarantee. This means that if a patient doesn’t like their lenses, they have 60 days to return them to their ECP for a replacement equivalent single vision pair, which they can have in clear or Transitions, depending on what their original pair was. The ECP then has 100 days to return them to Essilor. They will receive the replacement single vision pair free of charge.

Eyezen lenses wearer benefits at a glance

- Help to reduce eye strain and eye fatigue
- Reduce glare coming from bright screens
- Adapted to the profile of each age group (three profiles to suit 20-50 year olds)
- Long-term protection of visual health

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Lenstec Optical Group have launched a new Sports Rx protective range combining the very best in ergonomic design.

The VerSport range is delivered with solutions for both children, teens and adults. VerSport sports Rx goggles feature a number of specific features designed for wear in the sports arena but also as a general wear activity product, these features include: Impact resistant frames made from a high-yield polymer based material, dual locking with raised rear bevel edge system for great lens retention, an anti-shock and optimal air flow bridge, slightly deeper eye shapes for best fit.
What impact will technology, ocular medical developments and demographics have on the optical sector in the next 15 years, and what needs to be done to ensure practitioners, businesses and manufacturers are equipped to adapt to, and embrace, this changing landscape? These are the questions being raised by the Foresight Project, a new report commissioned by the Optical Confederation and College of Optometrists based on year-long research undertaken by the 2020Health think tank into the trends, influence and considerations of technology on practice, behaviours, education and regulation within the optical sector.

Changing roles and landscape

Speaking at the Foresight Project launch in London last month, attended by the minister of state for community and social care, the Rt Hon Alistair Burt MP, Alan Tinger, Foresight Project chairman, said: “Notwithstanding the case to remain in, or to leave, the European Union in the forthcoming referendum, we operate in a global economy. Just think about it: the largest retailer in the world has no shops and holds no stock – Alibaba; the largest marketing company in the world makes none of its own content – Facebook; the largest taxi company in the world has no vehicles – Uber; and the largest hotel company in the world has no hotels – Airbnb.

“Will we be able to say in the future that the largest opticians in the world has no practices? I don’t know, but what we can say for certain is that the practices of the future will be far different from today’s models. It naturally follows that the roles for practitioners in the future will not be the same as today. That goes to the heart of the Foresight Project, which is to inform the debate on what optical education should be about going forward. We will seriously fail both patients and recruits into the sector if we are training for jobs that will simply not exist in the same way in the future.

“One piece of kit alone being developed has the potential to revolutionise care. It is hand held binocular optical coherence tomography that in only a fraction of a second undertakes whole eye imaging, refraction and all aspects of an eye examination. Coupled with detailed analysis via artificial intelligence, it will lead to pin-point diagnosis and without the need for an operator or the space required for current style refraction. This imaging is much greater resolution than CT or MRI scanning. Technology of this type can either frighten the horses or inspire the practitioners of the future to upskill and become true doctors of the eye,” added Alan.
**Norville eyewear**

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Huge business opportunities

So what does the report conclude? For the optical business community, the Foresight Project is predicting “huge opportunities” for businesses to educate patients by harnessing technological advances in communication. Patients (‘participants’) will be encouraged to become more active in their care through educational resources, content marketing, real-time online booking and patient portals. Technology will be used to circumvent bureaucracy and legislation in order to increase the level of information available to patients about their own eye health.

The routine use of certain diagnostic tests and equipment currently seen as specialist (e.g. OCT) will be expected and demanded by increasingly “empowered and knowledgeable patients”, who will also increasingly enjoy a collaborative professional-patient relationship thanks to technologies such as app-based disease monitoring, smartphone solutions for low vision, and “smart clinical contact lenses” (i.e. intraocular pressure and glucose monitoring).

The expansion of the online marketplace will continue to affect retail optics, with direct to consumer contact lenses, frames and glazing, virtual try-on (with real-time social media connectivity), bespoke 3D printing, eye-health screening and both online and app-based refraction. ‘Generation rent’ and cash-strapped first-time buyers will be attracted by cheap and immediate solutions provided in the digital marketplace. This, in turn, will provoke new marketing and business strategies from High Street providers, with a stronger focus on eye health, loyalty schemes and their own, augmented online services.

Opportunities will also exist for practices to develop new trade in the recreation, fashion, workplace and gaming markets, particularly with the development of smart and augmented reality glasses. Community practices will also be able to develop niche business areas, extending from smart accommodating contact lenses for presbyopes to early intervention technologies on a range of conditions, perhaps including daily-wear contact lenses to stem myopia progression and gaming technology for amblyopia correction. The Foresight Project also looked at the negative effects of technology on eye health, which might lead to further demands placed upon the eyecare professional, who may be able to utilise rapid objective tests to detect early stage eye disease.

Independent practices will need to consider niche offerings to survive against the power of the multiples, though some struggling independents may well join the independent chain-franchise model, continues the report, which adds: “The emphasis on eye health will be key to survival in a climate of aggressive growth by online retailers and supermarkets”. Domiciliary providers will likely see the benefits of an ageing population and advances in portable equipment. Manufacturers will see a more competitive industry with venture capitalists and crowd-funding initiatives launching start-up and university-related technologies.

The period will see the birth of an era of low-cost testing wand diagnostic technologies aimed at non-traditional providers, as well as novel assistive technologies for a growing low vision market. Eyewear manufacturing is set to be revolutionised by 3D printing (additive manufacturing), in turn bringing about the normalisation of made-to-measure frames, the consumer as co-creator, and the increase of direct-to-consumer marketing, predicts the report.

Delegation of refraction

By 2020, educators will need to recognise a new generation of phoropterless refracting technologies, both in and beyond the High Street, continues the report. Universities will need to re-evaluate their undergraduate programmes, and reconsider the necessary scope of traditional background subjects as well as spectacle dispensing competencies. Dispensing opticians (DOs) are identified as being much more exposed to occupational threats of automation, and it’s predicted that DOs will see an educational curriculum with a wider emphasis on cutting-edge technologies, paediatrics, low vision and contact lenses.

As the population ages, clinical services increase, and extended chair time reduces practice profits, DOs may push ever harder for refracting rights, the report states. These conditions may synchronise with new refracting technologies, notably improved autorefration, automated subjective refraction and even patient-led refraction, to favour an option of fully delegated refraction, the report asserts. The full delegation of refracting responsibility would require changes to regulation, the report continues, suggesting that the regulators need to be concerned about online businesses that prioritise trade opportunities above health considerations.

“They need to warn the public of the risk of choosing self-refraction over a full eye health exam,” the report authors warn. “They can ‘kite-mark’ online companies operating according to UK regulation, but they cannot regulate sales and services delivered from abroad. Limitations and loopholes are not reasons to deregulate, however. Policy makers will not easily relinquish what is considered best practice in public protection and disease prevention.”

Emphasis on community

“No profession will be left untouched by new technologies,” says Julia Manning, former optometrist and chief executive of 2020Health, in her foreword to the report. “Technology presents an unprecedented opportunity to upskill and signpost the public, for people to actively participate in their health and wellbeing and enable professionals to deal with health needs that truly require their specialist skills.

“New technologies mean that with the guidance of eye health professionals, prevention, promotion and treatment can be embedded in the local community. But this needs to be prepared for, planned and managed in order to harness the potential and create long-term affordable and sustainable services. We sincerely hope the Foresight Project Report will form the foundation of planning for the sector for the next 10 to 15 years so it can adapt and thrive,” Julia concluded.

Rounding up proceedings at the Foresight Project launch, Alan Tinger said: “This is only the start. All parts of the sector need to take this project forward; discuss and debate, look to the future and engage together on all aspects of the report so that they can benefit from the great work carried out so far.” The Foresight Project committee plans to remain in place to monitor discussions and steer debate – so that optical practices, of all shapes and sizes, can think of stronger reasons for patients to enter their premises in the future.

Download the full Foresight Project at www.opticalconfederation.org.uk
MIDO 2016: creative and charismatic eyewear

The pioneering spirit is alive and well in eyewear with designs that are contemporary, skilfully produced in exquisite materials and beautiful colour palettes, writes Joan Grady

Mido 2016 in Milan showcased a vast representation of international designers and companies who offer timeless designs with stylish appeal to a wide range of consumers. Opticians are spoilt for choice with collections that reflect quality, originality and beauty. Exhibitors were pleased with the show, as David Chalmers, manager director of Silhouette, enthused: “Silhouette had a phenomenal fair; the launch of Pulse and of course our Atelier Collection surpassed all our expectations.”

exceptionally popular, as well as our new brands OMG! and Ascari, which enjoyed an enthusiastic welcome from the export market.”

Louise Brunton, general manager of Charmant, added: “Mido 2016 was busy on the Charmant stand. As we were exhibiting the newest releases for the Elle and Esprit sunglass ranges, it felt like spring had come early to Milan. The sunglass collections this year include on trend shapes, and an exciting mix of new materials and tones. The show itself was as busy as ever and well organised.”

Harmonious shapes and colours

Diversity showcased collections that ranged from well-loved classics and vintage inspired designs, to eyewear creations that were totally unconventional, bold and daring. The aviator, cat-eye, rectangular and wayfarer are frame expressions with great tradition; however, this season round, octagon, and boxy shapes reflect a new mood and style message.

Round silhouettes with graceful, soft shapes – which are extremely flattering on the face – were in evidence. Lightness was also spotlighted; even voluminous shapes are lightweight and comfortable to wear. Technology continues to infiltrate eyewear with ingenious innovations in acetate, stainless steel, titanium and carbon fibre. These new applications ensure that surprises are in store; new designs on show featured the most incredible textures, fabrics, sequins, crystals and embroidery.
Colours span a range from the elegant timelessness of neutrals — black, grey, a wide range of beige and brown colourations — to eye-catching, out-of-the-ordinary vibrant hues. Peter Beaumont commented: “In terms of trends for the international marketplace, vibrant colour palettes are still big news, but also warmer, more autumnal shades such as russets and muted oranges that warm the skin tone are popular.” Louise Brunton noted: “This year is all about colour, and our Adlib range of colourful, but lightweight titanium frames were attracting a lot of attention.”

Frames with unexpected details and impressive colours shaped the optical collection shown by Lafont Paris. The selections of sleek, pared-down designs, with distinctive textured finishes incorporate classic inspirations with contemporary zest.

**Precision-honed collections**

Art, technology and consummate craftsmanship underscore frame designs that are a delight to wear. The philosophy of Austrian Art Nouveau – the unique age of elegance and beauty – is the inspiration for Silhouette’s amazing Atelier collection. The frames are crafted in precious materials including 18k solid yellow, white or rose gold. The women’s designs include magnificently set diamonds, and coloured cabochon cut gemstones. The men’s frames unite gold and titanium in luxurious harmony, with ebony decoration.

Los Angeles designers Gai Gherardi and Barbara McReynolds from l.a.eyeworks debuted 17 exciting, fun frames. Superb craftsmanship spotlights the collection, as in Donut, an optical design with unique detailing. There appears to be a colourful stripe surrounding each lens; however, it is actually a bevelled insert made from ultra-thin surgical stainless steel. Colours are vibrant too – orange, bright blue and radiant red – the latter featured in many catwalk collections.

Kirk & Kirk has expanded its exceptional acrylic Vivarium collection with two new shapes, and an irresistible animal pin – a British Springer Spaniel – in either nine carat gold or sterling silver. Symbolic colours of spring and summer – navy and red – conjure seaside pleasures with sunglasses by Elle, while Paul Costelloe’s latest optical collection is a symphony in contemporary shapes and refined colourations. Pastel elegance on crystal acetate keynotes a distinctive design by Australian designer Colin Redmond at Niloca Eyewear.

**Creative audacity**

For designs with homage and history, the Gymnasts collection by Theo in Belgium celebrates gymnastic icons. An antique frame with an unusual bridge inspired the designs. The shape of the lenses has been intentionally kept simple so that all attention can be focused on the bridge. Olga honours Olga Korbut, the Russian gymnast who won three gold medals and a silver medal at the summer Munich Olympics in 1972. Crafted in stainless steel, vivid colours of royal blue, fluorescent lime, purple and red bring flair to this unique concept.

Award-winning Swiss designer, Julian Zigerli, teamed with Berlin-based Lunettes Kollektion to create a Limited Edition sunglass accessory – heart-shaped eyewear clip-ons. The over-sized mirrored lenses are, as Zigerli says: “Functional, practical and full of humour.”

Celestial wonders inspires new designs by Oliviero Zanon at Res/Rei in Italy, with frames named after the planets. Shapes and colours are subtly mysterious – just like the planets, and include round and octagon forms in vibrant colours. French brand Vue DC combines originality, exquisite materials and exemplary craftsmanship with sunglasses in luxurious colours that are entirely handmade in France.

For the independent optician, Mido is an oasis to discover timeless designs and inspired silhouettes. The event provides a global perspective of creative designers with enormous eyewear appeal for today’s discerning customers.
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