



Message from the President

Greetings ECOO members! I hope you will find this issue of our newsletter informative. There have been many developments over the last number of months which are summarised in this issue.

We held our ECOO autumn meeting of the General Assembly in Sofia, Bulgaria in October. Thanks again to our Bulgarian hosts, NABOO. In addition to ECOO members, we were delighted to have Dr Paul Murphy, president of EAOO in attendance, and also Dr Uduak Udom, president-elect of the World Council of Optometry.

At this meeting we heard from a guest speaker, Mr Andreas Lüthi, regarding challenges of the internet for online sales and what our sector can do to respond to the challenge. This prompted an interesting discussion of the General Assembly.

In our ongoing activities we continue to monitor regulations and legislation relevant to ECOO members, and we have an update on the Fluorescein classification issue in the newsletter.

As part of the joint work with EFAB, I represented ECOO at our World Sight Day event in the European Parliament, which you will have seen a press release about. A great deal of work from the ECOO secretariat and Mark Nevin has gone into this meeting, while Topcon kindly provided the equipment. I would also like to extend particular thanks to Carolin Truckenbrod, Didier Herrman and Harjit Sandhu for their volunteer work in manning the retinal photography stand with us.

In conjunction with the WCO, we continue to draft our European data to update our 'Blue book'. What still strikes me is the large variation in activity and scope of practice of our professions, and the confusion around the term optometry. How do we want our profession to progress is in some respects a matter for national countries to decide. We as ECOO have examples of countries where the role of optician-optometrist is a joint, single profession, and others

where it is divided into two professions, which none-the-less work side by side. It is not for ECOO to tell you what is right for your country but for ECOO to provide the platform for promoting high level of educational ability, information sharing, and encouragement to enhance to scope of practice for eye care in optometry and optics generally. But what do we want to be is forward looking and be a recognised as a primary eye care provider.

The fact remains that optometry and optics are still outside the healthcare arena in many countries. Despite conflicts of interest with ophthalmology and other professions, we must try to engage on matters of common ground. One thing we can work together on is the need for increased awareness of eye care and the prevention of avoidable sight loss. When we are seen to care about this issue we start to sow the seeds of being part of the eye care provider team. So to be part of the debate we need to continue and increase our engagement in these public health activities.

Working together with others at the World Sight Day (WSD) has been a great opportunity for ECOO to be part of this public health message, and we will continue to support EFAB and the development of a wider European vision coalition and the vision 2020 strategy.

Next year will see elections both for the European Parliament and for ECOO! We want to stimulate members to consider standing for election to ECOO and we will present more details of role descriptions for our spring meeting. In response to members' request, we will also develop a limit to the term of office members of the executive.

Best wishes

Julie-Anne Little



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Autumn meeting in Sofia

ECOO delegates met in the Bulgarian capital, Sofia, in October 2013 for their Autumn General Assembly. Between 18 and 20 October 2013, ECOO mem-

bers had the opportunity to update each other on recent developments in the profession, exchange ideas and share knowledge. In this issue of

Newsletter, you may find some **images from the event**, and recall the highlights of the guest speech on the **challenges posed by the Internet**.

The ECOO General Assembly in Sofia in pictures



The challenge of the Internet

The number of Business-to-Consumer internet sites that allow consumers to purchase spectacles and contact lenses online has been growing steadily over past years. This shows that professionals are adapting to the changing times and attempt to reach out to customers on-line.

Sales on the internet and the challenges/opportunities that social media represents for the profession are also important topics within ECOO. With the aim of having an in-depth discussion and to present different points of views with possible ideas for optimising the web presence of the sector, Mr Andreas Lüthi of Glassy.ch, a Swiss web-shop for spectacles, has been invited to the General Assembly in Sofia as a guest speaker.



Mr Lüthi delivered a powerful message to the audience emphasising that “the online business has to be seen as an opportunity and not as a threat”. He explained that current trends indicate that professionals will increasingly need to set-up web

shops alongside their physical presence in order to proactively match the modern customer needs. Being successful and sustainable in the online environment is strongly dependable on a well-developed “Omni-channel” strategy which guarantees the best possible shopping experience by ensuring that the customer is remembered and recognised in the on-line environment. Pursuing critical success factors, such as uniform products and prices, accepting glasses as fashion and leveraging emotions; building the market and reducing customers’ fears; using state-of-the-art technology and forecast realistically, not focusing solely on quick return on investment (ROI), are, according to Andreas Lüthi, the way forward.

Role for Primary Eye Care Emphasised at Europe-wide Forum on Men’s Health

ECOO representative Mark Nevin features in a report on men’s access to primary care services across Europe, published recently by the European Men’s Health Forum. The report looks at the contributing factors that lead to poor health outcomes for men in the 27 member countries of the European Union. It investigates reasons why men to approach primary care providers much later than women. It also looks for ways to engage men to look after their own health. ECOO was invited to ensure that optometry and optics could input to improving the men’s

health, and in particular their eye health. From their base in the community, opticians and optometrists are well positioned to make health interventions with men with a range of conditions including diabetes and high blood pressure that might otherwise avoid visiting their doctor or pharmacist.

Mark Nevin presented at the roundtable event in June 2013 on the rising levels of visual problems amongst both men and women across Europe, driven largely by the ageing population. He outlined that

since men are living longer, more are experiencing age related eye problems, with huge personal, economic and social costs. But 50% of sight loss is preventable through early detection and treatment - eliminating preventable sight loss would save €25 billion a year in the UK alone. He also noted that sight checks are a good opportunity to address broader health issues related to eye health such as smoking cessation, hypertension, and diabetes which is the leading cause of adult blindness. A full copy of the final report is available at on the ECOO website.

European Forum Against Blindness - World Sight Day 2013

Information stand in the European Parliament

On the occasion of World Sight Day and as part of the European Forum Against Blindness (EFAB), ECOO organised this year a two-day information stand in the European Parliament to raise awareness about eye conditions and the importance of having regular eye checks to prevent blindness. Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), staff and other visitors had the opportunity to have a picture of their retina taken and they could learn more about major eye diseases by means of two iPads that ran an application. An Xbox driving game also allowed visitors to drive while wearing visual impairment glasses. Moreover, EFAB partnered with the European Glaucoma Soci-

ety to include glaucoma awareness. The stand offered literature about visual health and diabetes comorbidities, and welcomed over 300 visitors, including 13 MEPs from 6 EU countries.

Dinner debate: "Blindness – the invisible threat. How can Europe respond?"

On 1 October 2013, EFAB organised a dinner debate within the European Parliament, entitled: "Blindness – the invisible threat. How can Europe respond?". The event was co-hosted by MEPs Marian Harkin (Ireland), Richard Howitt (UK) and Ioannis Tsoukalas (Greece). The objective was to inform policymakers about preventable blindness, present a call to action and most importantly launch a

Cost of Blindness Study by Deloitte which offered critical data about the burden of eye diseases in 7 key European countries. One year after the launch of EFAB, and less than a year before the European Parliament elections, World Sight Day 2013 was seen as an important opportunity to maximise the momentum created by the launch of the study, and trigger an important debate on how this data could be used and translate into policy action. The event also included an interactive discussion around a multi-disciplinary panel, on which ECOO was represented by Mark Nevin. The event was very well attended by MEPs, key stakeholders from the field of vision and public health, high-level medical professionals and third party organisations.



Regulatory Updates

Fluorescein stays on the European Commission's agenda

ECOO continues to monitor and engage at the European level on the important issue around the classification of fluorescein strips as medical devices vs. medicinal products. ECOO presented the issue at the Medical Devices Expert Group on Borderline and Classification at EU level in 2012 and aligned with eye care partners in order to make

the case that Fluorescein strips should be considered medical devices. ECOO has since submitted a further position paper on the matter under its European Contact Lens Forum (ECLF) affiliation. Sustained monitoring and outreach initiatives by ECOO and its partners have ensured that the Fluorescein issue remains on the agenda Expert Group,

which has been tasked with issuing a definition of the term "medical diagnosis", to support the classification efforts. The next meeting of the Expert Group is scheduled for March 2014, and ECOO will follow the activities closely. ECOO will continue to press for Fluorescein strips to remain available as a key investigative tool for eye care practitioners.

Data protection – last sprint before the European elections

The EU Directive on “Personal data protection: processing and free movement of data” contains a number of provisions of relevance to the health-care sector. In the current legislative discussions, ECOO supports general provisions of record keeping and patient access to data, but aims to ensure that further consideration is given to requests for information beyond basic rights level. On 24 and 25 October

2013, European Union heads of states met in the European Council and regarding data protection concluded that “It is important to foster the trust of citizens and businesses in the digital economy. The timely adoption of a strong EU General Data Protection framework is essential for the completion of the Digital Single Market by 2015.” The Council will continue negotiating at working party and at ministe-

rial level through 2014 until a common position of Member States is reached. It remains questionable whether the European Parliament can finalise its negotiations before the elections in May 2014. The new dynamics of the European Parliament regarding political parties and whether the same rapporteur would remain in place will determine how this legislation continues to be shaped.

Update from the Academy



Register now for Warsaw 2014

We are now taking bookings for the sixth annual European Academy of Optometry and Optics conference in Warsaw, Poland. The conference will be held at the Novotel Centrum Hotel, Warsaw, 15-18 May and will incorporate the ECOO Spring meeting.

A panel of expert professionals has created a programme of content for the conference which will inspire delegates and help with the advancement of optometry in Europe. The conference will once again include many clinical and educational topics, as well as the latest research developments.

Professor John Marshall from the Institute of Ophthalmology in the UK will be presenting a keynote lecture on the ageing eye, covering the clinical and nutritional parts of this growing issue for all eye health professionals. As the creator of the first

Diode laser for treating problems such as diabetes, glaucoma and ageing, Professor Marshall brings a huge amount of expertise to the conference.

In addition, the conference programme will cover all of the topics most relevant to optometry and optics across Europe, including the following clinical topics:

- AMD and macula analysis
- Understanding glaucoma
- Myopia and refraction
- Spectacles and dispensing

We will also be presenting workshops lasting three hours that will give delegates in-depth experience of a range of clinical techniques and optometric equipment, introduced to them at a beginner level. Workshop topics include:

- Making decisions about glaucoma
- Using ocular coherence tomogra-

phy (OCT)

- Binocular vision
- Using slit lamps
- Low vision aids

As well as all of this, the conference will have its usual mix of discussion sessions, case studies, networking opportunities and special interest groups. Attended by over 300 people from 40 countries, the Academy conference is taking optometry and optics forward in Europe by sharing new ways of working - in education, research and in patient practice, all across the continent.

To book your place at our conference or to find out more about the programme please visit our dedicated website - www.warsaw2014.info.

We look forward to seeing you in Warsaw.

Country News

Norway: Education and knowledge – the leading way forward By Hans Torvald Haugo – Secretary General of the Norwegian Association of Optometry



Taught knowledge within optometry needs be evidence-based. Optometrist BSc (hons) PhD, Per Lundmark, holds one of his beloved lectures within advanced statistics for students in optometry at Buskerud College

In Norway optometrists cover both optics and optometry. This is called the “Scandinavian model of optometry”. Norwegian optometrists work both as authorized health care personnel and as optical dispensers, to make sure each individual receives the optimal product needed for good vision.

In the last 40 years, knowledge enhancement has been a key issue. Since the early 1970s, the whole profession in Norway has worked together towards one goal: Optometry as a natural part of the healthcare system. We have still some way to go, but strive towards our vision to become the natural “first contact for a better sight”.

Hard facts

A national survey shows that 64% of the Norwegian population will first contact an optometrist if they experience a visual problem. Trust between patient and optometrist is vital for good eye-health care. 82% of the interviewees report that they trust their optometrists. No other healthcare professionals in Norway gain as high a score when it comes to trust.

The level of education is important. Today our 3-year bachelor degree is at a high European level. We are aiming for the European Diploma in optometry. There are several choices for further education after authorization as an optometrist including 2-year master degree-programs to gain specialization.

Higher education

The **Master in Optometry and Visual Science** at Buskerud University College fosters advanced theoretical and practical knowledge in clinical issues within the field of optometry and visual science. The emphasis is on evidence-based practice and how research informs practice including the evolution of eye care services and capabilities.

There are two specializations to choose between:

- Orthoptics and paediatric vision;
- General practice optometry.

Foreign students may be admitted to this program.

Nordic Master in Vision Rehabilitation

is a new topic on the agenda. Hopefully it will start in the autumn 2014. This master degree will be interdisciplinary and will provide people with bachelor degrees from various professions specialist knowledge in vision therapy and special education to care for people of all ages who are blind or have low vision.

The program will have a strong focus on training different professions to work in teams to best solve the needs of a person who is visually impaired or blind. The program will be the first of its kind in the Nordic countries and the first that is developed on the foundations of special education, optometry and ophthalmology. The aim is to train professions to work smarter through facilitating coordination and strengthening interdisciplinary culture and communication from medical assistance, interdisciplinary assessment, to habilitation and rehabilitation.

What about the future?

The next thing is a **PhD-program in healthcare**. This is currently being developed and we hope this will be running within a short time. The Norwegian Association of Optometry is really looking forward to tell Europe about research done by Norwegian optometrist in our own academic environment within topics closely related to our profession. We look forward to be able to define the importance of optometry in the society.

Sweden: Regulated health- and care profession

By Paul Folkesson - President of the Swedish Optometric Association

The Swedish optometrists have been a regulated health- and care profession since 1964. The country has a total of 21 authorized professions in the health- and care sector. In 2014, the optometry program will have been existed for twenty years at university level at the Karolinska University in Stockholm, and since 2004 also at the Linnaeus University in Kalmar.

Diagnostics from 2014

Important progress is being made for Swedish optometrists in the diagnostic field. From 1st January 2014, diagnostics will be allowed to optometrists that have pursued further education and that meet the requirements for diagnosing. That necessary level of education is considered to be MSc or equivalent. For the future the diagnosis part will be introduced at bachelor level as well.

The Swedish Optometric Association, Optikerförbundet (OF) has put significant amount of work in this for many years and is now very pleased with the final outcome for all optometrists. But the ones who gain most are the patients who will be receiving more cost-effective care. In this process OF has been supported by the ophthalmologists' association and the general practicing MDs' association.

CET an important tool

Swedish optometrists are through their authorization instructed to not only maintain but also develop their knowledge. The annual CET confer-

ence, organized by OF, has grown each year and has in the last 3 years brought together over 600 optometrists as well as facilitated an exhibition with over 25 industry companies. This makes Optometridagarna the largest CET conference in the Nordic region.

Patient security versus deregulation

The Swedish government is in a process of deregulation. In the optometric sector we have faced the implementation of the new Patient Security Law since 1st January 2011. According to the new Patient Security Law, even people who do not hold an authorization as health- and care professionals can sell anything to anyone without control, record-keeping or prescription, even to children under the age of 8y. Historically

there would be 3-5 incidents recorded each year, in general referring to people wearing contact lenses when they should not. In 2011, the first deregulated year, over 30 incidents were reported and in 2012 over 60 were noted.

Swedish optometrist in good co-operation with ophthalmologists

The OF is currently working with the Swedish authorities to adjust legislation to include stipulated, recurrent control of the eyes' health. In this sense, OF is as well supported by the Swedish ophthalmologists association. Overall optometrists and ophthalmologists have good co-operation nationally and we have great support in many specific question in the name of patient security.



Paul Folkesson opened the Optometridagarna 2013 in Uppsala, Sweden. Over 600 optometrists attended lectures under the broad theme "Our role in modern health care".

PHOTO WILHELM JARESAND

ECOO upcoming meeting

General Assembly in Warsaw (Poland), 15-18 May 2014

The ECOO Spring 2014 General Assembly will take place together with the European Academy of Optometry and Optics annual conference on 15-18 May 2014 in Warsaw, Poland. The event is being organised by the European Academy for Optometry and Optics (EAOO) with the valuable support of the Polish Optometric Association. Registrations are open and information on the meetings including the schedule and logistics are available on the ECOO website.



Save the date

ECOO Autumn 2014, Limassol (Cyprus)

The ECOO Autumn meeting 2014 will take place in Limassol, Cyprus, on 17-19 October 2014. Please mark your calendars accordingly.

Newsletter

The Newsletters are sent to ECOO's members and contacts via e-mail. Please inform us of any additions to the mailing list or of staff changes in your respective organisations. Should you have any news or updates which

may be of interest to ECOO members, please contact Fabienne Eckert and Sonia Florian at the ECOO Secretariat:
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