

**January 2016**

## **French educators view changing landscape for contact lens fitting**

**Contact lens practice in France is set to change and a new inter-disciplinary organization has been formed. IACLE Executive Board member ETTY BITTON reports on a recent meeting in Paris, organized by Alcon France, where these developments were discussed**



The meeting was held in conjunction with an Alcon Education Day on 15 January, 2016 at the Hotel California in Paris, France.

The Alcon agenda included a review of the industry and demographics of eye care professionals in France, as well as an overview of research from the latest British Contact Lens Association (BCLA) and American Academy of Optometry (AAO) meetings.

A total of 32 CL educators were in attendance from different areas of France, including four IACLE members.

**Geraldine Joly** (Alcon, France) offered the attendees an overview of the eye care landscape in France:

### **EDUCATION**

- There are 66 schools in France offering basic optician training (known as the BTS)
- There are 36 schools in France offering post-BTS degrees

### **EYE CARE PROFESSIONALS**

- There are 5,000 ophthalmologists in France whose average age is 53 years
- The average waiting time for an appointment is 5 months
- Many are expected to retire in the next 10 years
- There are 2,000 opticians in France who can 'adapt' CLs, not enough to fill the demands of the population

### **REGULATIONS**

- At this time, a patient needs to go to the ophthalmologist for an eye appointment to receive a prescription
- If interested in CLs, the patient can:
  - a. Receive a full CL Rx (type, power, parameters of CL) on a prescription that the optician can fill (no changes are permitted)
  - b. Receive an attestation from the ophthalmologist stating that they are able to wear CLs (ie there are no contraindications), at which time the optician can choose the CL for them

- Any aftercare that involves a complication (red eye, infiltrate, GPC) needs to be addressed by the ophthalmologist
- Opticians cannot perform any procedure that touches the eye (this includes fluorescein staining, lid eversion, looking at the back of the eye with an ophthalmoscope, tonometry, etc)

## NEW COLLABORATIONS

A new collaboration has been created named AFELC (*Association Française des Experts en Lentilles de Contact*), which is loosely translated as French association of contact lens experts. This is a collaborative between optician CL fitters and ophthalmologist CL fitters to share common ground. It is hoped that this non-political association brings CL fitters together to share best practices and ultimately elevate CL fitting in France. For more information visit <http://www.afelc-espaceprofessionnel.com/>



### Overview of research

FIACLE **Jonathan Douaud** (Scientific Coordinator of CL Education, Alcon France, pictured left) presented a review of scientific presentations from the AAO and BCLA meetings. These included presentations on CL materials, CL fits, compliance issues, tear film and dry eye. A breakout session helped educators identify priority topics they were going to share with their students.

### How can educators increase CL uptake

FIACLE **Helmer Schweizer** (Alcon consultant and 2015 IACLE Contact Lens Educator of the Year, Europe / Africa – Middle East, pictured above right) gave an overview of how educators can increase CL uptake. Discussion points covered patient demographics, refractive error demands over 40 (toric and multifocal), reasons for discontinuation (dry eye and discomfort) and the multitude of CL options now available.

One of the challenges discussed was regulations that limit wet lab experience for students in France. For example, some schools have their students get an ophthalmologist's approval that there are no contraindications for CL wear, while other schools simply do not require it. Others abide by the regulations completely and students never have an experience with a CL on the eye. There is frustration among educators, and they would benefit greatly from a wet lab experience for their students.

### IACLE presentation

At the beginning of the IACLE presentation, tribute was paid to Professor Brien Holden who passed away in July 2015. Members in the room who knew him shared some powerful words about the impact Professor Holden had on CL education worldwide, including his impact on IACLE.

**Etty Bitton** (pictured above centre) presented on the role and responsibility of being a CL educator. An interactive discussion revealed that responsibilities included:

- Mentorship
- Developing critical thinking skills
- Providing evidence-based learning
- Providing resources
- Providing the latest information on CLs (fitting, design, compliance, aftercare, complications, etc)
- Transferring the passion that they have for CLs to their students

- Fitting CLs in a safe and secure fashion
- Offering patients refractive options that suit their lifestyles
- Maintaining knowledge in the area of CLs (attend conferences, locally and internationally)

Further discussion covered the merits of organisations such as AOCLE and IACLE, which provide CL educators a forum for discussion with colleagues on topics they all share, not to mention the camaraderie that develops at these meetings. All the educators were encouraged to be a member of IACLE (application forms were distributed and the attendees were directed to our website to register).

It was highlighted that IACLE members can benefit from access to resources, networking and the New ICLC course. A brief description of the revamped ICLC was described and that these would be available to active members only. Even if their CL course was well established, the ICLC can be used as a resource or an added reference to benchmark their level of CL knowledge. The FIACLE exam was also discussed as a way to tease out strengths and weaknesses of their individual programs and establish objectives for continued improvement.

It was reiterated that the goal of IACLE is to assist CL educators and not students. It was also discussed that it would be difficult for IACLE to allocate resources without an active membership in France. With so many schools in France, membership should be one of the strongest in Europe and IACLE can assist in educational meetings amongst CL educators.

The attendees were enthusiastic about their day and networking with colleagues. A post-event survey will be distributed by Alcon and shared with IACLE.

### **Sharing educational approaches to multifocal fitting**

**Anne-Solene Westphal** (Scientific Director of CL Education) presented demographics of the ageing populations and their unmet visual needs. Fitting philosophies of multifocal CLs were discussed, underlining that the fitting guides are more precise than ever and should be followed to the letter.

Since students in France are unable to bring friends, parents, or fit themselves, hence their hands-on experience with multifocal fitting is nonexistent. They tend to fit empirically once in practice. Videos and case presentations would be hugely beneficial for teaching.

