



The Early Years

The founding meeting of what was to become the International Association of Contact Lens Educators took place in Monaco in November 1979. Dr Shehzad Naroo and Alison Ewbank trace the first years of the association and speak to some of those who were closely involved

Events across two continents in the mid-1970s were instrumental in promoting contact lens education. In the US, contact lens educators from across North America held their first official meeting in Chicago in 1974. The Association of Optometric Contact Lens Educators' (AOCLE) meeting in Rochester, New York the following year was the first to be sponsored by Bausch & Lomb (B&L) and held in conjunction with the company's National Research Symposium.

In Europe, B&L organized the first European Soft Contact Lens Research Symposium, in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1975. Subsequently known as the European Symposium on Soft Contact Lenses, the event was to be held in locations across Europe. The aim was to bring international contact lens practitioners together to learn from each other's clinical experiences of soft contact lenses and to be a platform for presenting the latest research.

Four years later, another new organization was to be created. In 1979, B&L held its European Symposium in Monte Carlo, Monaco (Figure 1) and invited along contact lens educators to discuss whether there was any interest in forming an international association of contact lens educators.

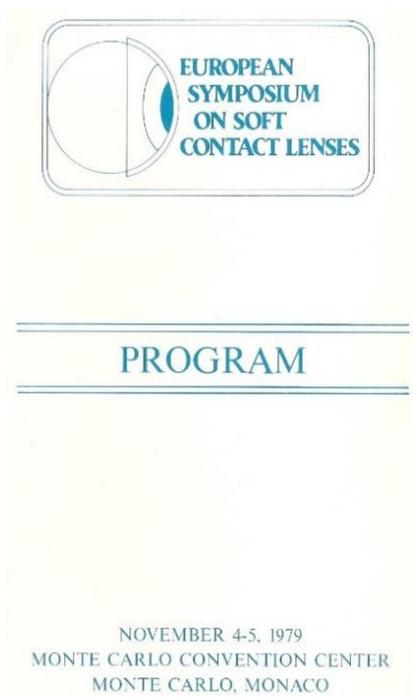


Figure 1. Program (left) for the Bausch & Lomb symposium held in Monte Carlo on 4 and 5 November 1979. And a souvenir (below) in the form of a paperweight made from an old casino chip encapsulated in plastic (courtesy of Richard Pearson)



Sharing experiences

In preparing for the B&L symposium – held on 4 and 5 November 1979 – at which Dutch educator John de Brabander was one of the two moderators, B&L proposed providing a forum where contact lens educators from around the world could meet and exchange their teaching experiences.

As de Brabander recalls: ‘Consulting with my co-moderator from France, Pierre Grosgeat, we decided to look positively at this idea. The company offered to provide a conference room to meet and where educational materials that attendees had developed would be on display.’

During the two days of the symposium many educators from various countries came to the meeting room and a lively exchange took place on how contact lens education was structured and executed in the various countries. ‘It was interesting to see the diversity of length, depth and content within the curricula on contact lenses at the various educational institutions,’ says de Brabander.

Inaugural meeting

Educators then held a meeting on 6 November 1979 and agreed to establish what was to become IACLE. Australian researcher Brien Holden was present, and the B&L representative, who acted as facilitator, was George Mertz (Figure 2). The meeting was followed by a breakfast 'wrap-up' session the next morning.



Figure 2. Brien Holden from the University of New South Wales, Sydney and B&L's George Mertz (right) were among those present at the founding meeting of IACLE on 6 November 1979 (courtesy of BHVI)

Around 16 contact lens educators attended, from Paris, Morez and Lille in France, Haarlem and Rotterdam in the Netherlands, Manchester and London in the UK, Göteborg in Sweden, Helsinki in Finland, Madrid in Spain, Olten in Switzerland, Köln in Germany, and also from New York in the United States, Johannesburg in South Africa, Waterloo in Canada, and Sydney, Australia, all representing their colleges/schools and contact lens teaching programs.

Among attendees at the founding meeting in Monte Carlo in November 1979 were the following:

Early Pioneers

Richard Pearson, City University London, UK

Don Loran, University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (UMIST), UK

Hilmar Bussacker, Fachhochschule Augentoptik, Olten, Switzerland

Brien Holden, University of New South Wales (UNSW), Sydney, Australia

John de Brabander, School of Optometry, Rotterdam, The Netherlands
Antti Vannas, University of Helsinki, Finland
Desmond Fonn, School of Optometry, Johannesburg, South Africa
Juan Delgado Espinosa, Universidad Complutense Madrid, Spain
Heinz Baron, Höheren Fachschule für Augenoptik, Köln, Germany
George Mertz, Bausch & Lomb, USA

At the end of the meeting it was concluded that further exchange and cooperation would be of great benefit to contact lens education worldwide. Three major areas of interest were identified:

- Comparing curricula of contact lens education
- Exchanging educational materials
- Sharing didactic methods and courses on various contact lens topics

B&L offered to contribute to and facilitate the organization of such exchanges and cooperation in the future. Educators and institutions would organize the content of these events. This was the impetus to decide to hold a similar educational meeting at the next B&L European Symposium that would take place in London in 1980.

Preparing the way

The educators present at the end of the session voted to form the International Association of Contact Lens Educators. So while the informal founding of IACLE took place in 1979, it was agreed to take steps to prepare for the official formation the following year.

Educators from all over the world would be invited to join the London meeting and bring 35mm slides to be incorporated into a bank of educational slides that could be used by all future members of IACLE. To support this resource, the proposal was to organize a session at the next meeting on the use of the slit lamp, especially slit-lamp photography.

Swiss educator Hilmar Bussacker was asked to look into the legal formation of IACLE and de Brabander to organize the exchange of educational materials. Holden and de Brabander were invited to organize demonstrations and training sessions.

Official foundation

It was in October 1980 that the second meeting of contact lens educators from countries around the world took place [1]. A Contact Lens Educators' Seminar was held on 23 and 24 October in conjunction with B&L's Third European Symposium on Soft Contact Lenses, in London (Figure 3). Following the initiative of B&L in Monte Carlo, IACLE was now officially founded.

Membership of the association would be open to all educators responsible for teaching contact lens practice at a recognized training institution. The purpose of the association was to exchange information in the field of contact lenses. There was unanimous agreement that IACLE was to be an independent and non-political association, and that its membership was open to individuals from any of the ophthalmic professions provided they were teachers at a recognised institution.

A first goal for IACLE was to build an audiovisual library from which educators could obtain educational material from all over the world. The first exchange of slides on the subject of corneal

changes due to contact lens wear took place during the London meeting. B&L also contributed slides. Slit-lamp photography, endothelial imaging and techniques for reproducing educational materials were the topics discussed.



Figure 3. Delegates at the 1980 meeting in London alongside the Third European Symposium on Soft Contact Lenses where IACLE was officially formed and its first board members were appointed (courtesy of *Neues Optiker Journal*)

Positive response

The 25 participants from 13 different countries commented very positively on the event and agreed to meet yearly. Educators agreed that the content of educational training should influence the level of knowledge of future contact lens practitioners, and that strong collaboration – especially in the rapidly expanding science of contact lenses – was very important.

Voted in as members of the board of the association for the first two years were:

- President: Hilmar Bussacker, Olten, Switzerland
- Vice President: Brien Holden, Sydney, Australia
- Secretary: John de Brabander, Rotterdam, the Netherlands

The association was registered in Switzerland in the Schweizerische Handelsregister SHAB with the Number 137 (SHB Nr. 137 / 16.6.1983, Page 2088).

Driving force

Richard Franz joined B&L's International Professional Services team and took over the organization of the B&L symposium in 1981, in Torremolinos, Spain. Franz worked on events in Amsterdam, the Netherlands (1982), Athens, Greece (1983) and Interlaken, Switzerland (1984). From 1985, B&L's David Wintermeyer managed the symposium, with meetings in Vienna, Austria (1985) (Figure 4) and Nice, France (1986).



Figure 4. Educators attending an IACLE meeting at the Bausch & Lomb European Research Symposium on Contact Lenses in Vienna in October 1985 included President Hilmar Bussacker (left), Vice President Brien Holden (center) and Secretary Don Loran (right) (courtesy of *Neues Optiker Journal*)

Holden wanted to bring together contact lens educators from around Europe at these meetings. The aim was to achieve more consistency in what was being taught in contact lenses, and to help educators keep more up to date with technological innovations.

According to Franz, Holden was a 'driving force' behind the IACLE meetings during this time. He comments: 'It was Brien's desire to help educators and the profession – and industry – move forward. Brien had studied at City University in London and had many connections in the UK community. That subsequently spread out more through Europe.'

But Franz also says that the nature of the annual IACLE meetings at the European Symposium was still evolving: 'For a while [the IACLE meeting] was more of a social gathering than a hard-core educational event.'

IACLE's first President, Bussacker, and Australian researcher and educator Deborah Sweeney, who took over the running of IACLE meetings, played prominent roles. From the Vienna meeting in 1985, Loran took over as Secretary. Sweeney's early role was to reproduce slide sets and collect information from members about what was happening in their countries. From 1990, she became Assistant Secretary, her first official IACLE title.

The meetings were initially hosted and supported financially by B&L. This was prior to the other multinational contact lens companies that were subsequently invited to support IACLE.

Long-term commitment

Juan-Carlos Aragón joined B&L's professional services team in 1985 and attended his first European Symposium on Soft Contact Lenses in Barcelona, Spain in 1987. By 1988, Aragón was head of international professional affairs and that year organized the symposium in Berlin, Germany where around 25 educators – mostly from Europe – attended the IACLE meeting.

Aragón's view was that longer term commitment than one year was needed to invest in IACLE's future. The aim was to raise the standard of contact lens education and providing educational assistance to educators in regions and countries where contact lenses were in their 'infancy'. So in 1989 B&L began a four-year investment in IACLE sponsorship totaling US\$1m.

IACLE meetings continued to take place in autumn to coincide with the B&L symposium. Meetings were held in Edinburgh, Scotland (1989), Sorrento, Italy (1990), Geneva, Switzerland (1991) and Bordeaux, France (1992). A representative of AOCLE was invited to attend the IACLE meetings.

Two of the IACLE pioneers – whose retirement as office bearers was announced at the 1991 Geneva meeting – were founding President Bussacker and Secretary Loran. They were presented with the first IACLE Awards for Outstanding Contributions to Contact Lens Education, as were B&L's President of its International Division, Ronald L Zarrella, and Director of International Professional & Clinical Services, Aragón.

Holden was elected as the new President and a regional structure was established. That year, IACLE is recorded as having 50 members in 15 countries, who delivered 30 educational programs to 600 students worldwide.

Global structure

1992 was a crucial year for IACLE [2,3]. The elected office bearers at this time included President Holden, Vice President Fonn, Secretary Sweeney (Figure 5) and Treasurer Charline Gauthier. Luigina Sorbara and Nathan Efron were Assistant Secretary and Assistant Treasurer.



Figure 5. Deborah Sweeney served as Assistant Secretary from 1990 and was Secretary in 1992, a crucial year for IACLE (courtesy of BHVI)

The association now had four Regional Groups: Europe, Africa-Middle East, Asia Pacific and Latin America. Each group had a Regional President – Hans Bleshoy, Jannie Ferreira, Maurice Yap and Fernando Ballesteros respectively – who joined the Executive Board, along with an executive member of AOCLE. Each region also had its own President, Vice President, Secretary and/or Assistant Secretary.

The aim of the new structure was to support facilities for regional networks of information, cooperation, and resource and skill sharing. IACLE had grown from 52 members in 1990 to have 117 members in over 40 countries by 1992. As more educators joined, the hope was that genuine global coverage would be achieved. Membership was also extended to those working in industry, who became Associate Members.

Initially IACLE had held just one annual meeting in Europe but from 1990 regional and national meetings were introduced, often held in conjunction with other major scientific and research symposia. While the European group traditionally met at the same time as the B&L European Symposium on Soft Contact Lenses, Asia Pacific members met in conjunction with congresses of the Contact Lens Society of Australia and the International Federation of Asian Pacific Associations of Optometry.

During 1992, IACLE Regional Meetings took place in Colombia and the Philippines as well as in France. IACLE representatives were subsequently invited to attend the AOCLE Summer Workshops. Executive/Advisory Board and Business Meetings of IACLE were held at least twice a year at that time, in conjunction with the American Academy of Optometry (AAO) and the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology (ARVO).

By mid-1992, IACLE had attracted additional major corporate donors. CIBA Vision, Allergan and Johnson & Johnson, contributed significant financial support in addition to the continuing major sponsorship from B&L.

Introduced that same year was the IACLE Educator Fellowship Program to provide educators with exposure to contact lens education and research at other institutions in order to broaden their experience [4]. The aim was to help ‘developing contact lens educators’ and the program was described as ‘beneficial to teachers, institutions and students’.

In the first three years of the Fellowship Program, IACLE provided opportunities for 24 educators from seven countries to visit more than 20 contact lens teaching institutions in other countries.

By mid-1992, IACLE had also drafted Minimum Standards for Contact Lens Education that would form the basis for a planned IACLE Contact Lens Syllabus. It announced its intention to establish IACLE Accreditation, at that time described as ‘an internationally accepted system for accreditation’ of contact lens educators.

Modules and materials

Another major milestone for IACLE was reached in 1992 with the appointment of IACLE’s first paid employee, Sylvie Sulaiman, as Manager, Education (Figure 6). Based in Australia, Sulaiman was brought in with the task of commissioning contact lens teaching modules and materials to provide educators with everything they needed for teaching contact lenses.

‘They could then focus on delivering the materials, getting students interested and creating knowledgeable practitioners,’ she says.



Figure 6. IACLE’s first paid employee, Sylvie Sulaiman (left), pictured (left to right) with Vice President Des Fonn, President Brien Holden and Pamela Capaldi at a Latin American Contact Lens Symposium hosted by Bausch & Lomb (courtesy of BHVI)

Prior to joining IACLE, Sulaiman had been closely involved in the Asia Pacific Contact Lens Education Program (APCLEP). This B&L-funded initiative of the Cornea and Contact Lens Research Unit (CCLRU) in Sydney was launched in 1990, to educate practitioners on all aspects of contact lenses and specifically to understand and manage issues with extended wear lenses in Asia.

APCLEP materials were already translated into four languages so were initially used as a base for IACLE’s resources. Meanwhile, IACLE’s presence in Asia was increasing. By the end of 1992, Asia Pacific had the highest representation of the regions, with 51 of IACLE’s 130 members. Europe followed with 41 members, with 17 in North America, 16 in Latin America and five in Africa – Middle East.

Sydney secretariat

Pamela Capaldi’s involvement began in 1990 when she left her previous role at B&L and worked part time for IACLE, just as it was beginning to gain momentum. In 1992 she was appointed Global Coordinator, working from an office in Colorado in the US. Capaldi’s initial role at IACLE was to

write newsletters for its membership and report on regional/country meetings. Early newsletters were simple two-column paper copies sent out by post.

Within a year of Capaldi joining she was working full time for IACLE. Meanwhile the IACLE Secretariat was based at the Randwick Campus of UNSW in Sydney, in a small section of the Cornea and Contact Lens Research Unit (CCLRU). Sandy Hunt-Sharman was appointed as Executive Director and Yvette Waddell came on board, progressing to Director of Administration.

Waddell recalls that the small IACLE team was given a portable office that was used as a storage room. The team moved in to the new office in October 1993. 'On our first day, Sandy and I opened the door to this shed and it was full of boxes – we couldn't get in there. So we had to clear all that out and create an office. We didn't even have a desk or a telephone – nothing. But it all came together.'

Remarkably, that same month IACLE held its largest ever regional meeting, in conjunction with Wichterle's Days of Contact Lenses, an event celebrating the 80th birthday of the inventor of the soft contact lens, Otto Wichterle. The European Regional Meeting in Prague, Czechoslovakia attracted 100 educators from 19 countries across Europe and beyond.

Five full days of education for members were followed by a Business Meeting. New Executive Board members were recruited to serve on a Regional Council. Michel Guillon was elected as the new European Regional President.

The event was made possible by support from IACLE's sponsors at that time: major corporate sponsor B&L, corporate sponsor Johnson & Johnson, corporate donors Ciba Vision and Allergan, and donor Paragon Vision Sciences.

Coming together

Commenting on those early days, Waddell says it was when money was spent on it that IACLE started to 'grow legs': 'IACLE was a real innovator in its time with its education model: how it handled educators, students, researchers, clinicians and industry personnel. It was a pretty inspirational business model too.'

Addressing the needs of educators – and, through them, students who would become the clinicians of the future – was attractive to the industry supporting IACLE. It was also an opportunity for industry personnel to network with IACLE members.

The impetus from Aragón and B&L was the driver for Holden to convince the contact lens industry to contribute – financially and in-kind – to the cause of raising the standard of contact lens education, particularly in developing countries. Others on the Executive Board, especially Sweeney and Fonn, assisted Holden in obtaining the industry's commitment to IACLE, resulting in an exponential growth of membership and activities.

What had started as a 'mates' club' in Europe grew into a global organization that was to extend its reach around the world.

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The birth of BUCCLE

Richard Pearson attended the founding meeting of IACLE in Monte Carlo in November 1979. Here he recalls the early days of its British counterpart, BUCCLE

In 1979, Don Loran and I considered that the formation of a group of British contact lens educators would be beneficial. While in Monaco, we decided that although IACLE could be useful, it would be of greater benefit to establish a British version of AOCLE. There were issues such as British Standards, professional examinations, operation of clinics that were of concern only within the UK. In many continental institutions.

At a meeting at City University in London on 23 October 1980 it was agreed to form BUCCLE – the British Universities Committee of Contact Lens Educators (now the British and Irish University and College Contact Lens Educators) – with a constitution based on the AOCLE/IACLE model. Its first meeting was held at Aston University on 16 December 1980 and the first officers were appointed.

In Europe around 1980, contact lens training was generally limited to the fitting of fellow students and friends. In Scandinavia it was delivered by means of courses for those who had already trained as opticians. In contrast, in the UK contact lens education had been for many years a component of the undergraduate course and students' practical competence was examined by the Worshipful Company of Spectacle Makers and the British Optical Association (later College of Optometrists).

Contact lens teachers involved in the professional examinations found it useful to convene over lunch to share thoughts on various issues, such as charges made to patients for contact lenses, arrangements for aftercare etc. Essentially, the formation of BUCCLE put these informal chats on a more sound and useful basis. Accordingly it dealt with various issues that were not relevant or applicable to IACLE.

From 1981, BUCCLE representatives were nominated to attend the IACLE meetings in Europe. B&L funded one BUCCLE member and BUCCLE used some of its funds to permit at least one other

member to attend. Each year, members reported back to BUCCLE on IACLE developments. BUCCLE minutes for its 19th meeting on 11 November 1992 record that Brien Holden, President of IACLE, invited BUCCLE to become an affiliated organization and it was agreed to accept.

IACLE and AOCLE: a joint history

IACLE Treasurer Dr Etty Bitton and Dr Lester Caplan, a previous Treasurer of AOCLE, describe the early relationship between the two organizations

The Association of Optometric Contact Lens Educators (AOCLE), established in 1974, is an organization whose major objective is to enhance communication and provide resources for faculty involved in all aspects of the contact lens curriculum in schools and colleges of optometry in North America (US, Canada and Puerto Rico).

The AOCLE has an annual 3-4 day meeting workshop to assist faculty to gain new skills, network with other faculty members and to keep abreast of the latest industry developments. Topics are chosen depending on the needs at the time and the meeting is held at a different school each year. At each meeting, a time was reserved to update attendees on the activities of IACLE.

Over the years, it became clear the goals of the AOCLE and IACLE, established in 1979, were similar and the organizations began a mutual invitation to each other's meetings. This bilateral exchange allowed the IACLE members to see what was being done in North American schools of optometry, and North Americans to learn about IACLE innovations and challenges in contact lens education worldwide. Industry members attending the workshops also provided perspective into geographical contact lens prescribing trends.

Over the same time span, the field of contact lenses underwent numerous technological advancements. Consequently, schools and faculty had to develop strategies to adjust to the changing landscape and incorporate them into the contact lens curriculum.

AOCLE and IACLE have kept abreast of each other's events via several ways, including an AOCLE representative attending IACLE events (typically the vice-chair) and IACLE faculty attending AOCLE annual workshops. Furthermore, newsletters were reciprocated and education tools (videos, photographic libraries, pamphlets, guides, etc) were shared between the organizations.

In future years, AOCLE was also to have a significant presence at subsequent World Congresses on Contact Lens Education. These are just some of the ways in which AOCLE and IACLE have come together over the past four decades to enhance contact lens education worldwide.