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Contact Lens and Anterior Eye

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/clae

Editorial

The broad church of international contact lens societies



There are many national professional membership societies for contact lens practitioners such as the Contact Lens Society of America or the Cornea and Contact Lens Society of Australia or the Algemene Nederlandse Vereniging van Contactlensspecialisten (Netherlands), to only name a few. Other societies, such as the British Contact Lens Association or the European Contact Lens Society of Ophthalmologists, for example, perhaps have a more global reach. There are also a number of contact lens societies and associations that aim to be more international but with limited membership. Three spring to mind and represent very different aspects of the field. The International Association of Contact Lens Educators (www.iacle.org) has members in around 80 countries with membership limited to those involved in contact lens teaching [1]; and the International Society of Contact Lens Specialists (www.iscls.net) which was developed by and for practitioners providing specialist contact lens care. The third may be less well known to contact lens practitioners; the International Society for Contact Lens Research (ISCLR) (www.isclr.org) which was established in 1978, as an independent group to discuss and showcase the latest and emerging innovations in the field of contact lenses. There were early suggestions that the ISCLR could act as an international umbrella group for national contact lens societies, but this was never realised. Like the BCLA, it was agreed that membership would be from a broad church, encompassing scientists and researchers involved with contact lens research in the broadest terms, independent of their professional background. Unlike the BCLA, ISCLR membership was to be limited to around 100 people only and who are active in contact lens research.

The first scientific symposium of the ISCLR was held in London, UK in 1980, and soon after membership and funding mechanism for the group were established. The intent was for the ISCLR's symposia to be biennial, however in 2021 it was postponed due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. The symposium has always been a closed meeting, abstracts and transactions are not published in the public domain and are only shared with members and symposium attendees. A unique aspect of the symposia is the preference for shortened presentation times and extended discussion periods, so blocks of 5-minute talks are followed by up to an hour of discussion. All attendees at the symposia are expected to participate. Early career researchers and students can present in this protected environment too, with the society providing peer-reviewed scholarships to support symposium attendance. The relationship between the society and industry is another key aspect and is cemented with non-member industry-based representation via the Corporate Advisory Board (CAB). The CAB plays an important role in providing guidance on symposium themes and planning and may present their latest company research. All talks follow the same 5-minute style and are subject to the same rigorous selection process, regardless of whether the

presenter is from the CAB, or a student or a full member. There are exceptions to this 5-minute time limit and that is for the symposium keynote speakers, who are allowed 15 min and are a mix of leading researchers from both related and unrelated fields. The biennial symposia remain the primary function of the ISCLR and are intended as an arena where researchers and industry can discuss preliminary work or ideas that will shape future developments for contact lenses.

Porto, Portugal was the venue for the 2022 four-day meeting and was attended by ISCLR members along with CAB representatives, keynote speakers, students and prospective members. There were four symposium tracks for the talks, Myopia, Ocular Response, Materials and Solutions, and Advanced Contact Lens Technology. These represent the current major areas of research and development emerging in the field. Over the last few years myopia has emerged as more than an ametropic nuisance but more of a global concern due to increasing prevalence. Optical products, especially contact lenses, have been developed and improved in recent years to slow myopia progression, and significant research is currently underway in this area. At the 2022 ISCLR symposium there was much discussion regarding biomarkers that help identify those who are predisposed to myopia or those who are predisposed to better outcomes from management of myopia progression. The results from these studies would certainly be beneficial for patients and practitioners when planning myopia management strategies. The symposium also heard from a number of research teams around the world that are investigating products to improve ocular comfort during contact lens wear and better understand ocular physiology as a response to contact lens wear. Another major theme at the symposium was the topic of advanced use of contact lenses and included new techniques for measuring the effect of contact lenses such as using functional magnetic resonance imaging or visually evoked potentials. One highlight was to learn about the collaborations between Silicon-Valley companies and contact lens manufacturers, promising a wide array of new contact lens products and applications in the not-too-distant future. The impact of COVID-19 on contact lens wear featured in the program but the fact that only two presentations (on viral load from COVID-19 and the ocular effect of wearing surgical masks) were delivered signals the focus of the symposia is generally on future aspects of lens wear and not necessarily on areas of exploration as featured recently in CLAE [2]. On the final day of the symposium the organisers summarise the highlights and unanswered questions from the symposium and try to conclude what the key areas are where research should be focused to progress the field of contact lenses. The history of the effectiveness of this model is summarised in the paper by Woods and Fonn (2021) [3]. A highlight for the society and the meeting is the awarding of the Ruben medal; named after the founding President Montague Ruben and intended as an

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.clae.2022.101767>

Available online 16 September 2022

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acknowledgment of an outstanding contribution to contact lens research. In 2022 this was awarded to Professor Mark Willcox from the University of New South Wales in Australia. The 2022 symposium of the ISCLR also marked the end of Professor Fiona Stapleton's term as President with Professor Nathan Efron taking up this position for the next two-year period. The next meeting of the ISCLR is planned to take place in 2024, likely in the Americas but the location not yet confirmed.

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