



ECOO NEWSLETTER

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MESSAGE FROM CINDY TROMANS, ECOO PRESIDENT



We hope this newsletter finds you in good health and in high spirits, amidst concerns with COVID-19. As we're each navigating these uncharted waters and doing our part in observing physical distancing measures to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus strain and ease the burden on health systems, we encourage you to stay socially connected and also take care of your [mental health](#).

On a professional level, as members of the healthcare work force and as practitioners who interact with patients and people, we encourage you to stay in regular contact with your national health authorities and work with them in the interest of patients. As you will see in the next sections, ECOO is monitoring developments across a number of Member States and is facilitating an exchange on best practices between members. For any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to us.

In terms of our regular work, our organisation is fully equipped to continue the work remotely, as we do throughout the year. We continue to use online coordination tools and communicate on a daily basis within the Executive Committee to ensure continuity. As the EU institutions are also teleworking, a few high-level meetings we were due to participate in have been postponed. These have been replaced by conference calls, with Fabienne Eckert and our respective designated experts are actively part in and carrying on with ECOO objectives.

We are indeed again working hard on a host of regulatory matters that have been on our radar including the Medical Devices Regulation and the classification of spectacles under the new rules. We look forward to updating you on all these matters in more detail in our next General Assembly, which will take place in an exceptional format, online.

The deadline for the Blue Book 2020 questionnaire has passed and I would like to give my personal thanks to all of you that took the time to complete it. We have offered much support to assist members in completing the data as accurately and reliably as possible, and I look forward to the next steps in getting the publication launched.

All the best,

Cindy Tromans

COVID-19: GUIDANCE TO OPTICAL AND OPTOMETRIC ASSOCIATIONS

The World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the outbreak of COVID-19, a disease caused by a novel strain of coronavirus, a pandemic on 11 March 2020.

The response to the pandemic varies between EU countries, and the situation for optical and optometric professionals and their customers and patients therefore varies across Europe. The situation is also evolving on a continuous basis. ECOO is closely monitoring developments and is in regular contact with its members, providing general guidance and facilitating an exchange on best practices between members.

For instance, while closures of retail businesses - including optometric / optical shops – have been imposed at national level in most countries as part of measures to avoid social contact and prevent gathering of large crowds, several of our members have recommended to their own members that optometrists and practice owners pause providing routine sight tests and eye examinations, to only offer essential services and emergency consultations.

ECOO advises members to remain in close touch with national health authorities in order to ensure they take the best precaution measures for their patients, and for themselves.

The WHO offers [a free online course](#) on infection prevention and control, which may be useful for practitioners as well.

Read the ECOO guidance [here](#)

EU RESPONSE TO COVID-19

The European Commission is [coordinating a common European response](#) to the outbreak of COVID-19, mobilising to reinforce the public health sector and mitigate the socio-economic impact across the continent. Notably, it has:

- **Research:** Mobilised research projects and initiatives to advancing knowledge for the clinical and public health response on COVID-19, including on rapid point-of-care diagnostic tests, new treatments and new vaccines
- **Procurement and relief:** established a joint procurement agreement to purchase medical countermeasures, and coordinates mobilisation of offers of assistance, such as the provision of protective material.
- **Economy:** activated the general escape clause of the Stability and Growth Pact, to allow Member States to undertake measures to deal adequately with the crisis, while departing from the budgetary requirements that would normally apply under the European fiscal framework.

ON THE EU AGENDA

EU MEDICAL DEVICES REGULATION

In an effort to relieve pressure from national authorities and industry and to enable them to focus on meeting urgent priorities related to the COVID-19 crisis (medical devices and equipment), the European Commission [has announced](#) it is working on a proposal to delay enforcement of the EU Medical Device Regulation by one year. Policymakers are aiming to submit the proposal in early April, and hope the European Parliament and Council will work to quickly adopt the postponement.

ECOO continues to closely follow the key challenges that remain to be ironed out, such as those surrounding the establishment of the special notified bodies for the conformity assessment, the re-certification of all products and the application of a Unique Device Identification (UDI) applied on every medical device by the manufacturer. ECOO has also provided input in order to clarify the classification of spectacles within the MDR and to ensure the requirements for eye care professionals are well defined.

According to the European Commission's [NANDO database](#), to date, there are 12 notified bodies in 7 different Member States. This represents around a half of the number of notified bodies the European Commission predicted it would designate by the end of 2019.

The MDR will apply under highly unusual circumstances. Given the challenges of the current COVID-19 public health crisis, the European Commission has issued a joint implementation and preparedness plan. This clarifies the priority areas considered essential in order to have an operational system in place by May 2020, and includes the EUDAMED, notified bodies capacity, implementing acts and clinical evaluation. The Commission has also indicated that the names of the selected experts to join the Expert Panel on Medical Devices will be named until May.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

In the first 100 days of its new mandate, the European Commission now by President Ursula von der Leyen, focused on delivering its most important priorities set in the political guidelines – including a strategy for [Shaping Europe's Digital Future](#). This strategy covers a wide range of aspects – from cybersecurity to digital education, as well as Artificial Intelligence (AI).

In the eye care sector, as well as in the healthcare sector more broadly, AI has the potential to revolutionise to help practitioners in screening, diagnosing and helping treat eye conditions. AI has been growing in popularity in specialties where image analysis is used. The Commission's [White Paper](#) on AI, which focuses on building a framework for trustworthy Artificial Intelligence, is open for consultation until 19 May 2020.

e-HEALTH

ECOO has been formally accepted as part of the European Commission e-Health stakeholder group. The group will support the Commission in the development of actions for the digital transformation of health and care in the EU. Its mandate will last until 2022.

While the first meeting scheduled for 13 March 2020 was postponed due to new measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, ECOO remains in contact with the European Commission to support moving the agenda on e-health forward

UPDATE FROM THE EUROPEAN ACADEMY OF OPTOMETRY AND OPTICS

With the rise in COVID-19 cases around the world and new measures to counter the spread of the novel coronavirus strain, HELSINKI2020 had to be cancelled alongside with all public gatherings and happenings in Finland and the rest of Europe alike. The [Finnish Association of Vision and Eye Care NÄE](#) together with the [European Academy of Optometry and Optics EAOO](#) and the [European Council of Optometry and Optics ECOO](#) have put tremendous amount of work and effort into preparations for the joint meeting, and look forward to resuming them as the meeting takes a year's leap forward, to April 2021.

Any setback is a chance to explore new opportunities. The European Academy is committed to its mission to develop, advance and promote education and research into optometry and optics and related subjects, and will be convening a series of meetings online.

NÄE and EAOO are offering delegates, sponsors and exhibitors the chance to hold on to their registration or other commitment until next year's EAOO Helsinki2021 and to also gain free access to the Oulu Optometria Forum 2020, a seminar organized in Oulu, Finland, in September 2020. ECOO delegates who paid their registration fee for the ECOO meetings or the combined ticket, can also use their ticket for the new date in 2021. "If you have been on board for EAOO Helsinki2020 in some form, we are asking you to stay, as no one wanted to see this great event being cancelled. As an extra benefit you will be part of Oulu-autumn-seminar, for no extra cost", Panu Tast clarifies.

"We thank the over 100 + speakers who are a part of the programme for their personal time in preparing their interventions for the EAOO Spring 2020 programme. We look forward to being in touch with each one of them to advance the same plans for Spring 2021", says **Nicholas Rumney**, EAOO President. "The need for unity and collaboration has never been greater, and neither has the need to understand the multi-faceted challenges that optics and optometry face or solutions that are available for better eye health. The two new happenings will be an opportunity for exchange and learnings, so we hope to see many of you attend in person or online", he added.

Save the dates:

- **26-27 September 2020 Oulu Optometria Forum**
- **22-24 April 2021: ECOO Spring General Assembly 2021**
- **23-25 April 2021: EAOO HELSINKI2021**

For more information, and for guidance on next steps, please visit the [event website](#)

UPDATE FROM THE WORLD COUNCIL OF OPTOMETRY

In vision care's year, 2020, it is apparent that optometry is entering a time of both challenge and opportunity. The release of the WHO "World Report on Vision" (WRV) in 2019 outlines these challenges and opportunities. It is up to optometry as a profession as to how it responds.

The report highlights the impact of worldwide population growth and ageing. In parallel with this overall population growth, there will be an increase in the percentage of the population over 60 years of age, and also an increase in life expectancy at birth over the same time period.

Population change will increase the need for vision and eyecare. The rise in myopia prevalence globally, further evidenced in the WRV, is but one facet of this. The increasing ageing population will increase the absolute number of people with chronic disease that accompanies ageing. This extends beyond refractive care aimed at reducing avoidable vision impairment and blindness. The WRV illustrates the challenges presented by conditions causing vision impairment such as glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, age-related maculopathy and cataracts. Also considered in the report are other eye conditions including presbyopia, rehabilitative vision care, dry eye, blepharitis, conjunctivitis; all of which lead to the need for eyecare services. Optometry is challenged to help meet these increasing eyecare needs.

The WRV also speaks to issues of access to eyecare. In many regions, eyecare is delivered in secondary and tertiary healthcare settings which can restrict access. It also speaks to gender and other issues related to access and the inequality of access to and utilisation of care for women and the socially disadvantaged. In the report, the WHO is proposing integrated people-centred eyecare (IPCEC) as an approach to health systems which will contribute to achieving universal health coverage (UHC) and WHO's Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG3): "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages". This requires a healthcare team approach to eyecare, which is an opportunity for optometry.

Optometry needs to position itself to speak and act towards the achievement of improved healthcare outcomes for society in terms of eyecare. This is at the crux of the message of the WRV. Optometry needs to ensure that it has the relevant competencies in ocular disease and clinical and management skills that will enable the profession to participate fully in a healthcare delivery system to deliver enhanced health outcomes both at a country level, and an international level, aligning with and participating in the international health agenda.

Optometry must be prepared to accept the challenge to move outside and beyond the box that current versions of optometry may be sitting in. This will mean education and legislation change in a number of instances for optometry to support a role in this space and to contribute to the management of this burden of disease; in public health so that optometry both recognises and contributes to the wider public and social needs of health care in terms of health care teams, and prevention, detection, and management.

Adjunct Associate Professor Peter Hendicott

DipAppSc(Optom), MAppSc, PhD, Grad Cert (Ocul Ther)

President-Elect, World Council of Optometry

ECOO upcoming meeting

The ECOO spring General Assembly will take online on 15 May 2020 and ECOO members will receive all the details in due course. The autumn General Assembly will take place from 9-11 October 2020, in Berlin, Germany.

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