

# ECOO NATIONAL ARTICLE

## IS THE FUTURE REALLY DIGITAL?

Understanding the growing role of technology and e-health in eye care is an important strand of ECOO's work. We aim to look forward to see what is on the horizon for eye care and eye care professionals, understand the implications of these new technologies and provide members with information that will help them and the sector prepare for and operate effectively in this ever changing environment.

ECOO's work on e-health and technology has for some time been ably led by Hans Torvald Haugo, Secretary General of the Norwegian Association of Optometry. Hans Torvald represents ECOO in EU working groups on the implementation of the European Health Data Space and has also co-authored, with EPHA (the European Public Health Alliance), an article on the need to restore trust in public health systems. He also co-authored the 2022 ECOO position paper, [Better vision and eye health in Europe through digital development](#).

ECOO members have participated in workshops looking at working with new technologies during our last two general assembly meetings – in Helsinki in May 2024 and most recently in Hamburg in October 2024. In May members were encouraged to consider what they understood by new technology, share information about what was already being used

in their own countries or in development, come to a better understanding of the risks and opportunities of those new technologies, and identify what support they, and more importantly, their members – eye care professionals – need to confidently and effectively use new technologies.

At the October workshop, delegates focused their attention on one area: automated refraction. Discussions this time focussed on how this technology might impact on eye care professionals, on eye care businesses, and on patients.

Following on from these workshops, we have decided that we want to expand our work in this field, with a new working group who will review what we have learned from our members and then look at how we might develop new position papers, information and guidance to help eye care professionals across Europe.

From our workshop discussion with members, we have learned that there are, inevitably, varying attitudes towards these developments. On the one hand, new tools and new ways of working can free up the time of the eye care professional and may well be attractive to young people entering the profession. But there is a consensus that eye care professionals will still need to

oversee procedures and step in for more complex patients. But will all eye care professionals still be able to do so or is there a risk that some will lose certain skills?

It is also clear that no simple assumptions can be made about what patients want. A growing proportion of the population are used to and comfortable with technology. Indeed some may have higher trust in the results from medical technology than from a person. But this does not apply to all, and a good eye care professional will need to adapt the way they provide their services to meet the needs of different patients.

Change will always have its enthusiastic supporters – the early adopters - and its wary critics. But change will happen. So the question then is, how do we support people – eye care professionals, businesses and patients - through this transition? The words that come up

most frequently are regulation and information.

Firstly, there is a concern that just as professionals are regulated, so technology and its use may need regulation, or at the very least clear guidance. And ideally such regulation or guidance would be common or shared across Europe, helping to ensure consistent safe practice.

Secondly, change is already happening. But it is often happening in an uncoordinated way, with different countries adopting different approaches and at different speeds. This makes it hard for eye care practitioners to always know what technologies may have been and what is likely in the short term. Which is why sharing information is at least as important.

When it comes to change, rushing in headlong is probably unwise, but so is refusing to engage.

*You can read an interview with Hans Torvald Haugo about his interest in technology and his work for ECOO [here](#).*

## ABOUT ECOO

The European Council of Optometry and Optics (ECOO) represents the interests of optometrists and opticians across Europe. Our members are national professional associations from 25 countries who together represent more than 150,000 opticians and optometrists. ECOO aims to promote eye health to the public across borders and to harmonise clinical and educational standards of optometric and optical practice throughout Europe.