



**Annual General Meeting  
Wednesday 21 November 2007, 6:30pm  
Victorian College of Optometry**

**Secretary Report**

Good evening everybody and welcome to Keratoconus Australia's 6<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting. Most of the Association's activities have been covered in detail by Larry's President report. I will summarise, in no particular order, some of the key achievements for the financial year 2006/7.

1. Database development & data entry

We were fortunate to have had the involvement of an experienced database developer to assist us creating an interface for the entry of questionnaires completed by members which asks about keratoconus vision correction, eyecare received and private health insurance. Data entry of some 1000 questionnaires has been completed and this provides us with a rich dataset to assist in our efforts to lobby for better rebates and a better costing scheme for contact lenses. In addition, this valuable information gives KA the ability to pursue research opportunities with both researchers already involved with keratoconus and those wishing to develop academic expertise in this area. The next stage of this process will be to engage a data analyst to produce in the first instance, some demographic data and clinical characteristics of our member base.

2. Research updates

Dr Colin Clement continues to intermittently provide concise updates - in simple layman's terms! – for our website on the latest developments in keratoconus research. In March 2007, he reviewed an article about refractive surgery and keratoconus. In late 2006, we were informed about the German study which currently has the longest follow-up of patients who have received collagen cross-linking treatment published in Current Opinion in Ophthalmology. In July 2006, the research update was on the efficacy of contact lens storage solutions against different microbes found in water (*Acanthamoeba strains*).



### 3. Partnerships: Vision2020 Australia

Vision2020 Australia held its third Member Forum in Canberra in March this year. Vision 2020 Australia is an umbrella group for eye health-related organisations in Australia. Its aim is to prevent avoidable blindness and to improve vision care throughout Australia. KA is a corresponding member of Vision2020 and this partnership has been, and will continue to be fundamental in assisting us in awareness raising, advocacy efforts and provides a direct link to other vision organisations.

The Forum's opening address was given by the Hon Tony Abbott, Federal Minister for Health, who spoke about 4 broad and emerging themes in health. These were: improving private health insurance, chronic disease, national health registration, and demands on actions in public hospitals. Minister Abbott spoke briefly on the long-term costs of poor eye health to Australia and concluded his speech by answering questions from the audience. I was exceptionally fortunate to have had the opportunity to query Minister Abbott about the way in which specialised contact lenses for keratoconus are costed. I explained that these specialised lenses are excessively expensive to patients and private health insurance rebates offer little reprieve, as greater rebates are provided for "off the shelf" contact lenses or spectacles. Furthermore, that optometrists appear to be forced to incorporate their fees for the time taken to fit lenses for keratoconus patients onto the cost of contact lenses as the current Medicare scheme does not recompense them appropriately. In the 60 seconds or so that I had, I attempted to also bring to Minister's attention the deficiency of optometrists experienced in fitting specialised contact lenses for keratoconus. Minister Abbott agreed in principle that contact lenses for keratoconus patients should be reclassified as medical devices and strongly encouraged Keratoconus Australia to put forward a proposal to the Federal Government so that this issue can be promptly addressed. Following the forum, The Department of Health and Ageing has

contacted Keratoconus Australia on two occasions to ensure that the proposal will be submitted. As mentioned by Larry, KA submitted a proposal to the Government, however their response was less than satisfactory. This forum itself, however, was an incredibly valuable opportunity – possibly the most valuable yet.

#### 4. Phone support

While an invaluable opportunity for keratoconus patients to have their concerns about their condition heard, and often anxieties put to rest, it has to be said that it is decreasing in its popularity as people increasingly seem to opt for email. On average, we now field approximately 3 calls per week. By and large, people who phone generally ring for 2 reasons: 1) to request information about eye-carers experienced in fitting contact lenses, and 2) have recently been diagnosed and wonder about their prognosis. We exercise the same caution with handling phone support as we do with email support, as described by Larry. We always inform callers that we are not healthcare professionals and refer on wherever necessary. I am rather disappointed to have to report that phone calls are not being responded to in the desired turn around time. I am accountable for this and as my responsibilities within KA, my (paid) work, and other commitments continue to increase, I am having considerable difficulty to return calls within business hours, which appears to be the best time to catch people. I am often limited to making only evening calls and I avoid leaving messages to prevent people returning the call at a possibly unsuitable time. As such, we will have to re-consider the phone support service we aim to provide in 2008. Following on from this,

#### 5. Volunteers and offers of assistance

At the onset I would like to thank KA members and supporters who have kindly offered to assist our organisation and I apologise for not being able to act on these gestures in the way I would like to. We are always extremely grateful for the offers we receive and as I have already eluded to, I am simply unable to

manage these requests, albeit only a few. As our core active volunteer base diminishes, the responsibilities for our remaining few grow, creating a vicious cycle.

It is a passion of mine to foster and nurture the aspiration in people to assist volunteer organisations, because as we all know without volunteers, the not-for-profit sector, broadly speaking, would simply not survive. As such, as much as I would like to continue to request for volunteer assistance, it would not seem right for to me to do so when I know personally and professionally that I cannot fulfil the co-ordinated effort required to appropriately manage volunteers. This is something the Association will also need to carefully consider in the coming year.

#### 6. "Thank yous"

July of this year saw our Treasurer of 4 years, Liz Bray, resign. It was a difficult decision for Liz, but as her family commitments grew, Liz' time for KA had to be compromised. Liz assisted us for much longer than any of us had anticipated. This was always a "temporary" arrangement until we found somebody else. Well despite our best efforts – and Liz we really did try - the time passed and Liz continued to act in her role. Liz did an amazing job dotting every 'i' and crossing every 't' when it came to looking after the KA books. Something I have certainly appreciated as I've since taken on some of the booking keeping tasks. Thank you Liz.

I would like to thank the Professor Neville McBrien and College of Optometry for allowing us to use their facilities for our seminars. I'd also like to thank Heather Johnson for being so accommodating with our requests. Finally, the KA small but tight-knit KA Committee: Larry and I have developed a unique working relationship which seems to go from strength to strength each year and there is certainly no doubt without Larry's involvement in KA the Association would not survive. Marisa and Laura, thank you both very much for your continued support.

I hope this report has not appeared to have had too much of a less than positive spin, so I do firmly reiterate that we are humbled yet pleased with our achievements over the past year. The coming year will be an exciting and challenging one for KA as we explore our operating functions and exactly how we deal with our "idea rich but time poor" Association. In time, we would envisage seeking input from members to assist us in deciding on the most effective manner to carry out the Association's activities.

Thank you.

Belinda Cerritelli  
Secretary