

LETTERS

Ed. Note – The following letter was received in response to the CSO Editorial Vol 43 No. 1

Dear Editor:

I would like to respond to your recent editorial (Canadian Journal of Optometry, March 1981) since it takes both soft contact lens practitioners and manufacturers to task in some cases rightfully so, and in other cases not. Having seen the field from both practitioner and manufacturer sides, I feel especially qualified to comment.

First let me address the major issue that the editorial fails to recognize. There is no creditable technology to measure wet lenses when immersed in saline. There are some capabilities in the hands of manufacturers and hardly any methods available to practitioners. Therefore, assessing the optical performance of a soft contact lens is not yet possible with the sophistication used in spectacles or even hard contacts. Oh yes, it can be done with a dry soft lens, but that is not the final product. It would cost manufacturers millions to develop these specialized systems, and some of the larger companies are doing just that. However, it takes time.

Second and just as important, is that the clinician has no valid way of easily measuring visual performance with a soft lens on the eye. The Snellen chart is very limited as a predictor of visual performance and we could spend pages on this subject alone. However, American Optical has developed a simple test of contrast sensitivity which we hope to market soon. We expect that it will prove valuable in assessing visual performance with soft lenses on in a much more meaningful way than standard Snellen acuity.

Thirdly, there is extensive price competition among soft lens manufacturers, but this competition has been fueled by practitioners striving to get the lowest possible selling

price. Support the chief price cutter and who will be left to do this wonderful and needed research? In our capitalistic system, research does not get funded when a company is unprofitable. Practitioners must keep that in mind when purchasing products purely on a price basis.

Finally, clinical research on soft lenses concerning the significance of manufacturing tolerances, design parameters, flexing characteristics, etc. is useless until we develop greatly improved in-vitro and in-vivo evaluation techniques. We are today obsessed with physiology because it is the most predictable and consistent measure that a clinician can use with any confidence. We are also enamored with central K readings because they provide nice neat numbers. Unfortunately the numbers are frequently useless since we are fitting the peripheral cornea and sclera rather than the central cornea. Clinicians have lensometers, but hardly ever measure lens power. Why? They have no confidence in blotting a lens dry and then looking at mires that are poorer than any rigid lens they have ever viewed. They cannot measure lens base curve with confidence. They cannot modify a soft lens to their own design, and even if they could, they would have no way of determining what they have produced.

The point is, soft lenses are not made to fit individual eyes. Rather, eyes are selected to fit available soft lenses. This is different than any other modality and constitutes the real distinction between soft and hard lenses. It is a point I wish practitioners understood better. If you advocate a multitude of parameters, you advocate higher costs, longer waiting time for delivery, and the same old uncertainty because neither of us are sure you are getting *exactly* what you ordered.

Let me finish by quickly addressing a few of the other issues you raise. We have done a good deal of research on

lens flexure, effects on polymers by temperature, humidity, etc.; and the literature is extensive on these subjects. There are clinical studies constantly being published, all demonstrating superb Snellen acuity (in spite of patients complaining about vision with soft lenses). Base curves do not seem to be as critical in thin lenses and lens design (which is rather sophisticated) is related to the material and its physical properties. But, we are in the stone age of soft contact lenses and will never progress beyond Cro-Magnon unless consumers (optometrists and other fitters) support the companies who conduct meaningful and comprehensive R & D programs rather than the price cutter who is able to offer the lowest price by *not* spending money to improve his product or develop new ones.

Sincerely,

Lester E. Janoff, O.D.
Director of Professional Services
American Optical Corporation

Dear Editor

I would like to thank all those who sent letters to the government of Israel in response to their proposed optometry act. This act would have severely limited the practice of optometry in Israel. I recently received a letter from the Israel Optometric Association saying, that thanks to our efforts, the government will be changing the act to provide optometrists with full professional status. There will be a period of time allotted to allow those persons who do not meet the set educational standards to upgrade themselves. Failing this they will become opticians. The IOA is hoping to next establish a school at one of the universities in Israel.

Many thanks for your efforts.

Best Regards

M. Larry Sheldon, O.D.