From the Editor's Desk

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In early March a meeting (*The Inaugural World Congress on Refractive Error*, organized by the International Centre for Eyecare Education or ICEE) about refractive error took place in Durban. About 600 delegates from around the world attended and four days of presentations, concerning everything that you ever wanted to know about refractive error but were afraid to ask, were well received by the attendees. Some of the presentations were about the methods that are being used in different parts of the world to improve access to eye and vision care. Such methods included, for example, producing simple refractionists or vision technicians who do not necessarily worry too much about ocular or systemic disease but nonetheless perform a simplified refraction and provide spectacles to patients. The idea being that with time these individuals can hopefully receive further education and skills and thus can diversify their activities to provide a more comprehensive and complete service (but, meanwhile, in the shorter-term they can have a major impact in reducing non-pathological vision impairment in particularly less-developed and poorer communities. Another interesting concept was making up spectacles from a simple *optical workshop* consisting of single vision lenses (two lenses are cut from a single lens and a file is used to make them suitable for placing in a frame that is made from two metal wires that are bent into shape with pliers). The spectacles actually look very good and can be produced for a cost of about R7 or $1. The simple workshop (small wooden workbench, saw, file and pliers) is also very inexpensive and costs about R245 or $35. Even more impressive is that unemployed and handicapped individuals can be trained to make these simple spectacles and thereby help people to get such spectacles while also earning themselves a modest living. (Interested readers can search the internet for Eugene Konig, and *Glasses for Missions* which he established to promote his ideas.) But, there were also other talks that looked at studies of refractive state in various regions worldwide and many governmental and non-governmental organizations were also represented. Indeed anyone with an interest in refractive state and its compensation via optical and even medical or surgical means could find something of interest. Worldwide, uncompensated refractive is actually a major cause of vision impairment (with estimates of about 150 million people involved) that can impact on learning and development in children and productivity in adults and thus improved methods to reduce the problem are enjoying wide-spread attention. Optometry and Ophthalmology need to be, and should be, a part of the solution to this problem but they will need to move beyond their sometimes narrowly defined interests and they will have to be more willing to adopt, or at least accept, sometimes quite radical or creative and innovative approaches that may not always be exactly the usual type of thing that they might like or prefer to see happening in the arena of eye and vision care. But the problems of vision impairment (and unnecessary blindness relating to serious problems such as cataract) appear to be much larger issues than these professions can handle or manage in isolation and so whether or not the two professions actually support some of these possibly more radical approaches these changes are going to happen, and indeed they are already being applied with some vigour especially in areas of the worlds such as India and China. And, rather than threats these recent approaches or ideas should be viewed as unique opportunities to contribute substantially towards improving access to vision and eye care and thereby to reducing unnecessary visual impairment.