

Remote Optometry, a forced change for clinicians, academics and researchers: What comes next?

We are reaching the end of 2020, a very unique year that will remain in our memory for a long time and for many reasons. Few things about the pandemic are worth talking positively about in any way, except that as with cold weather and no clothes “need teaches naked woman to spin yarn” to survive the winter. The need to keep optometry going during the pandemic lead to a new appreciation of the use of digital tools which, until recently, were mostly used for personal communication and entertainment. Now these tools are used to deliver eye care remotely, to improve the quality of education, and remotely operate research. As an example, Dan Coates at University of Houston and Susana Chung at the University of California Berkeley have developed psychophysical tools (remote2020) that allow optometry students to participate in experiments, both as patient and as practitioner, to understand both their own visual function and the importance of different clinical vision tests, using their personal smartphone either from their own home or from a laboratory at the university.

Great challenges tend to create great opportunities and the remote delivery of optometric education is a good example of this. Now that the first steps have been taken it is up to the optometric community to decide if we want to keep moving optometry towards a stronger line of tele-eye care. The future needs tele-optometry and great benefits are expected in areas such as management of myopia, dry eye and low vision. The momentum has been generated by the difficult times we are experiencing. We should take advantage of this and start thinking about which laws, technology and mindset need to be adopted to make tele-optometry a reality. Human contact is unlikely to be fully replaced by virtual contact; however, digital encounters in optometry are promising, they will potentially increase access to optometric services for a wider patient population, thereby saving both vision and money. Much research is required to improve these processes, but perhaps we have already reached the point of no return? Let’s embrace the challenge!

The editorial team wish you all a better and happier year for 2021!

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