

UEMS Section of Ophthalmology

A brief history

The Ophthalmology Specialist Section of the UEMS was founded at Ghent, Belgium, on 23 March 1963 on the initiative of Prof. Jules François: present were the representatives of the six foundation countries of the European Union. These were Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and The Netherlands.

At that meeting the aims were laid down as (1) to develop uniformity of training and qualifications in the six countries of the European Union and (2) to harmonize the practice of ophthalmology in the six countries as laid down in the Treaty of Rome. It was to be said that the programme is the same in the year 2011 because of the complexity of these problems and the different national approaches to them.

Since its foundation the Section has shown a remarkable consistency in its thought and action. Ophthalmology has been clearly defined by the three components of its field of activity: **medical, surgical and optical speciality**, despite the diversity of practice that could be found in the different countries of Europe.

Consensus was rapidly achieved regarding the methods of training in ophthalmology and the standards necessary in the training centres. **The length of training has been agreed at four years minimum.** With regards to refraction and prescription of glasses and of contact lenses the six foundation members had rapidly agreed on the necessity to restrict the role of opticians and optometrists in these areas. However the admission of the United Kingdom and of Ireland prevented further agreement because of fundamental differences in the practice of refraction in these countries. However in the domain of orthoptics consensus was easily achieved in accordance with the guidelines of the European Union of Orthoptists in the training and the practice of orthoptists.

The opening of the European Community to a number of other countries in 1980s resulted in considerable differences in the ratio of ophthalmologists in the different countries together with the proportion of female ophthalmologists in the profession and the number of residents in training. Other questions looked into were the law on transplantation surgery, the waiting lists of patients, the costs of treatments and the effect of the number of ophthalmologists and optometrists from the former East Germany together with the effects of these factors on harmonization and treatment.

The Section of Ophthalmology, probably in common with other Sections of the UEMS, finds itself confronted more and more by the constant changes in European Law, the changing fields of activity in ophthalmology and the changing requirements in training of ophthalmologists.

The Field of Activity of Ophthalmologists

While in some countries, like in United Kingdom, ophthalmologists, much less numerous than in other EU countries, focus on surgery and disease treatments, and thus delegate or abandon part of their role to non-specialist doctors or other professionals, **the basic principle remains of an overall care of the population for everything concerning the visual system.**

Therefore, it was natural that such auxiliaries (especially optometrists) - since they are responsible for optical correction by glasses or contact lenses, for additional

investigations, for rehabilitation of functional vision, for prevention and screening ... be tempted to increase their autonomy and surreptitiously encroach on the proper medical field, including the therapeutic prescription of eye drops, using lasers, even with a drift toward refractive surgery.

So we have to defend ourselves, in our different countries, against these complementary professions that have become competitive. The Section of Ophthalmology is involved in this fight, and has contributed in several ways.

In drafting a **definition of the medical act**, which has been approved by the UEMS Council, the Section of Ophthalmology has provided a basic rationale of considerable weight, which was been used in several countries by several professional organizations in their national fight against the illegal practice of ophthalmology, or against the legal and regulatory attempts to encroach on our field.

Other current work of our Section are on the **medical demography**, which is obviously not unrelated to the scope of our specialty. And in this regard disparities are huge in Europe, and the gaps widen further, with enlargement to "associate" countries.

The training of ophthalmologists

The free circulation of specialists within European Union requires mutual recognition of the medical and specialist diplomas of each country and the Section of Ophthalmology interested itself from the beginning in the training of young candidate ophthalmologists in the different countries of the Union. The Section of Ophthalmology was responsible for the adoption by the European Commission of the rules controlling the **acceptable standards and duration of training**, which has been established at four years minimum.

But more is necessary. For if these rules are to become Directives it is essential from the start to establish criteria of **quality**. We have seen that training and supervision of ophthalmologists differ in the different states. Following this, the fear arise that centres with certain laxity in the standards of training could produce ophthalmologists who are inadequately or poorly trained and yet who are able to practice in any country of the Union.

This is why the UEMS has required all of the Specialist Sections to form working parties charged specifically with overseeing the standards of training. This is done by the European Boards. The principal objective of the European Board of Ophthalmology, is to guarantee in every country of the European Union a **high level of quality and the highest possible level of training of the candidate specialists**.

The **European Board of Ophthalmology (EBO)**, working group of the UEMS Section of Ophthalmology, was formed on 31 October 1992 in London with two delegates from each country, one representing the professional body of that country and the other representing the academic or training body. The work of the Boards has consisted of drawing up a number of rules and the formation of different committees to oversee the various aspects of training. There are six of these committees: Executive, Education, Residency Review, Exchange Programme, Finances, and, more recently, Continuing Medical Education Committee.

Since 1996, the annual Plenary Assemblies of the Section have successively held in:

- 1996 Maastricht
- 1997 Strasbourg
- 1998 Vienna
- 1999 London
- 2000 Florence
- 2001 Nyon
- 2002 Helsinki
- 2003 Dublin
- 2004 Budapest
- 2005 Potsdam
- 2006 Amsterdam
- 2007 Stresa
- 2008 Krakow
- 2009 Prague
- 2010 Tallinn
- 2011 Ljubljana
- 2012 Lisbon
- 2013 Sofia
- 2014 Malta
- 2015 Dubrovnik

UEMS Section of Ophthalmology Executive Committee 1963 – 2015

PRESIDENTS

1963 – 1970	Dr Jozef DAMM (D)
1970 – 1982	Dr Albert BRONNER (F)
1982 – 1986	Dr HUDSON (UK)
1986 – 1990	Dr Giovanni CUCCO (I)
1990 – 1994	Dr Peter EUSTACE (IRL)
1994 – 1998	Dr Jean-Luc SEEGMULLER (F)
1998 – 2000	Dr Francesco TUCCI (I)
2000 – 2002	Dr Klaus DILGER (D)
2002 – 2006	Dr Diederick JANSONIUS (NL)
2006 – 2010	Dr Michèle BEACONSFIELD (UK)
2010 – 2014	Dr Costantino BIANCHI (I)
2014 – 2018	Dr Hank BONNEMAIJER (NL)

GENERAL SECRETARIES

1963 – 1971	Dr STROOBANTS (B)
1971 – 1982	Dr LAUE (D)
1982 – 1988	Dr Peter HENRY (NL)
1988 – 1996	Dr Guy VLIEGEN (B)
1996 – 2008	Dr Jean-Paul DERNOUCHAMPS (B)
2008	Dr Guy AFLALO (F)

TREASURERS

1963 – 1982	Dr Peter HENRY (NL)
1982 – 1988	Dr Pierre JACQUEMIN (B)
1988 – 1990	Dr Peter HENRY (NL)
1990 – 1994	Dr Fred HENDRIKSE (NL)
1994 – 2002	Dr Diederick JANSONIUS (NL)
2002 – 2012	Dr Hannele NYKANEN (FIN)
2012 –	Dr Eija VESTI (FIN)