

Celebrating 50 years of optometry education in Norway

We are nearing the end of 2022. The year when the Norwegian optometry education celebrated 50 years of innovation and excellence. Congratulations, Norway!

During these 50 years the professional education has gone from being a craft to becoming a health care profession with education at bachelor's, master's and doctoral level. It all started in Kongsberg in 1972, with a 2-year vocational training program in optics at Tinius Olsens Tekniske School under the leadership of Jacob Kjell Hultgren. In 1977, this became a 2-year engineering college level degree program, which was extended to a 3-year degree program in 1987. This took place under the leadership of Kjell Inge Daae, a visionary leader who motivated and inspired many of today's staff to travel to the UK, Australia and Canada to build on their education and later to work towards and obtain PhDs. He understood the need for the education to be research-based and the need to have staff that engaged in research as an integrated part of the education program.

Fast-forward to 2003 and the education has developed. It became a 3-year bachelor's degree program in optometry under the leadership of Janne Dugstad and now for the first time recognised as a health education. In 2004 the Norwegian authorities followed suit and gave optometrists, under Norwegian law, the right to use selected diagnostics drugs. This was of major benefit to patients and was strengthened in 2009 when optometrists also gained the right to refer directly to ophthalmologists. The optometry education received accreditation for a master's degree program in visual science in 2008, a program that was revised and accredited as master's in optometry and visual science in 2012. This happened under the leadership of Bente Monica Aakre, the current and first head of department with a PhD.

The optometry education continued to develop and became

part of an interdisciplinary PhD program in person-centered healthcare that gained accreditation in 2014. This was the same year that accreditation was obtained for an interdisciplinary master's in vision rehabilitation. All these education programs became university degree programs in 2018 when the institution became the University of South-Eastern Norway.

During these 50 years, more than 1700 optometrists have graduated, of which more than 450 have also completed a master's degree. The education is continuing to develop, and the next step is to develop the 3+2-year (BSc + MSc) programs into an integrated 5-year master's program to meet the increasing needs of eye care professionals in Norway.

The speed of the development of the education program in Norway has been possible because a total of 24 optometrists, who have taken all or parts of their optometry education in Kongsberg, have also gained PhDs. The most recent have obtained their degrees at the home intuition, but many have spent several years abroad at different international institutions before returning to Kongsberg. The Norwegian optometry education has by now fostered 5 professors and the sixth professor of optometry in the Nordic countries also obtained his first degree in Kongsberg.

The golden jubilee of the Norwegian optometry education was celebrated during this year's Kongsberg Vision Meeting, on the 8th of November. The abstracts are published in this issue, and you will read that the meeting focused on the importance of gaining knowledge about refractive errors, visual function, and eye disease in different populations of different regions of the world. In turn, this should improve the knowledge among clinicians and, therefore, the outcome for patients.



Celebrating 50 years of optometry education in Norway. Current and previous academic leadership of the optometry education. From left to right: Professor Emeritus and previous rector Gunnar Horgen, Head of Department Bente Monica Aakre, Dean of Faculty of Health and Social Sciences Pia Cecilie Bing-Jonsson, Rector of University of South-Eastern Norway Professor Petter Aasen, Previous Head of Department Kjell Inge Daae. Photo: Jan Henrik Kulberg

The prevalence data for refractive errors in Scandinavia is an important example in that it shows that the distribution of refractive errors is different here than in other regions of the world. The high prevalence of hyperopia highlights the need to use cycloplegic drugs in clinical practice to ensure that a child with hyperopia is in fact diagnosed and treated for hyperopia. This topic was given special attention with an excellent keynote entitled “The importance of correcting hypermetropia” by Prof. Bruce Moore from New England College of Optometry.

The topic of the importance of wearing glasses if you need them was underlined by Lee Turner from the Department for Education, His Majesty’s Government, UK. He told us about the reasons for and the results of a large randomised clinical trial that is nearing its end, “Glasses in Classes”, whereby the first results show that children who need glasses and who wear them perform better in school with significantly improved literacy skills compared with those who need glasses but do not wear them. Prof. Solfrid Bratland-Sanda emphasised the role optometrists have in promoting healthy behavior amongst children and adolescents. Prof. Vibeke Sundling spoke about the topic of person-centered communication in clinical practice, a

On behalf of SJOVS, we wish you all a safe and peaceful winter.

Editor-in-Chief Rigmor C. Baraas

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References

Bjørset, C. O., Pedersen, H. R., Synsteli, G. O., Gilson, S. J., Hagen, L. A., Langaa, T., Thorud, H.-M. S., Vikesdal, G. H., Baraas, R. C., & Svarverud, E. (2022). Non-cycloplegic refraction cannot replace cycloplegic refraction when screening for refractive errors in children. *Scandinavian Journal of Optometry and Visual Science*, 15(2). <https://doi.org/doi:10.15626/SJOVS.vol15i2.3645>

topic which is essential for ensuring that the patients’ needs, values and preferences guide clinical decision making.

In this issue you can also read a paper by Bjørset and colleagues (Bjørset et al., 2022) in which they compare different refractive error screening methods in children, showing the role cycloplegic drugs play in detecting all hyperopes. This highlights the importance of mastering retinoscopy as a clinical skill, as well as the need for us to work globally to ensure that optometrists get access to cycloplegic drugs.

The issue also contains the abstracts from the first Norwegian Vision in Stroke (NorVIS) young researchers conference (Falkenberg, 2022).

We now also announce a third special topic. We encourage optometrists, researchers, and related professionals to submit their work to be considered for publication in a SJOVS standard issue over a two-year period. If accepted, manuscripts will be included in the online collection of the given special topic. The third special topic is going to be: patient-reported outcome measures (PROMS). The special topic editorial on PROMS is authored by associate editors António Filipe Macedo, Alberto Recchioni and Helle K. Falkenberg (Macedo et al., 2022).

Falkenberg, H. K. (2022). Norvis 1st young researchers conference 2022: Abstracts. *Scandinavian Journal of Optometry and Visual Science*, 15(2). <https://doi.org/doi:10.15626/SJOVS.vol15i2.3639>

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