



Photos: Silke Sage

2010 – 2020

The Decade of Scleral Lenses

I remember a Contact Lens Manufacturers Association (CLMA) meeting in October 2007, held in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Beautiful place, and I decided to rent a car. I happened to run into Rob Breece at the airport and gave him a ride. We were talking about scleral lenses on our way to the event. But hardly anyone was talking about sclerals back then. Rob was one of the few people who believed in scleral lenses for a larger audience than just the extremely challenging corneas. I was lecturing on corneal topography at that CLMA meeting as well as on GP bifocal lenses, if I recall correctly. Those were some of the few topics in 2007 that the industry was focused on, and the outlook was not particularly all that bright for the GP lens industry. Nathan Efron had just predicted 'the demise of the GP lens by 2010.' At Nederlands Contactlens Congres 2010, Nathan Efron even theatrically buried the GP lens, dressed as the grim reaper. [By Eef van der Worp](#)

The CLMA president at the time of this 2007 CLMA meeting was Janice Adams, and the theme of the meeting was 'Get Your Kicks on Route 66.' Route 66 has been called 'the most famous highway in the world,' according to CNN – and it remains the ultimate road trip. If anyone would only have known how much that theme, more than 10 years later, would be so applicable – even prophetic – for our industry. Maybe Rob Breece would have, but certainly not me. The road trip that the contact lens industry has taken over the last decade or so on has been quite a ride.

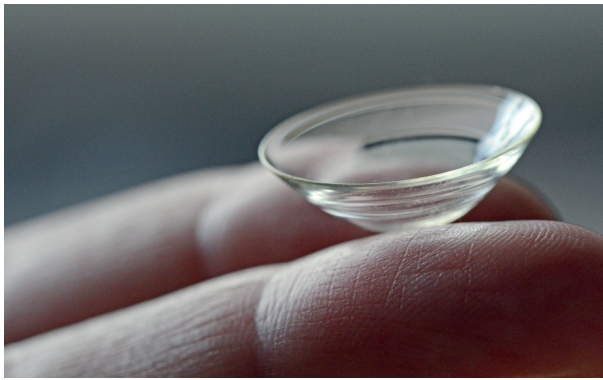
HINDSIGHT IS 20/20

'Hindsight is 20/20' is a commonly used English saying that means 'It's easy to know the right thing to do after something has happened, but it's hard to predict the future.' The year 2020 is the year of clarity. Looking back on the very successful Global Specialty Lens Symposium (GSLS) 2020 and further back, it is fairly clear that in hindsight, the last decade – between 2010

and 2020 – was the decade of scleral lenses for our industry. At various contact lens meetings in the 'late zeros,' scleral lenses were scarcely mentioned - if at all - even at the industry's own CLMA meeting. Back in 2010, there were hardly any resources on sclerals; and in fact, that is the year the scleral lens guide was written, a guide solely devoted to better understanding the basics of scleral lenses, written with the help of a board of international experts in the field.

SCLERAL & SPECIALTY LENS SYMPOSIA

Now, in 2020, everything is completely different. Both the pre-conference track and the general program at GSLS 2020 – and surely the breakout sessions by manufacturers – were full of scleral lens topics. A new scleral lens institute had its inaugural meeting – the International Forum on Scleral Lens Research – on Wednesday prior to GSLS 2020. To top it off, the Scleral Lens Education Society – an organization with over 4200 members and 200 fellows – held its annual reception.



How cool to see an entire room of 'scleral lens folks' – from residents to experts, educators, researchers and industry people. And Europe now has its own specialty lens meeting, born out of the scleral lens specialty. The International Summit of Specialty Contact Lenses (ISSCL), now called The Summit of Specialty Contacts (SSC/The Summit), took place November 8-10, 2019 in Rome, Italy. There were 250 attendees from 31 countries and 6 continents. The next SSC/The Summit will be held September 4-6, 2020 in Rome again (hopefully - if things run normal). In addition, there are a number of scleral lens clinical guides and even a full textbook on the topic now.

ROAD TRIP

Only in hindsight it is easy to say that it was clear that this 'road trip' would happen. But boy, the previous 10 years for sure can be called the Decade of Scleral Lenses for our industry. Rob Breece unfortunately passed away in August 2009, before he could witness any of that. He would surely have enjoyed the ride. ■

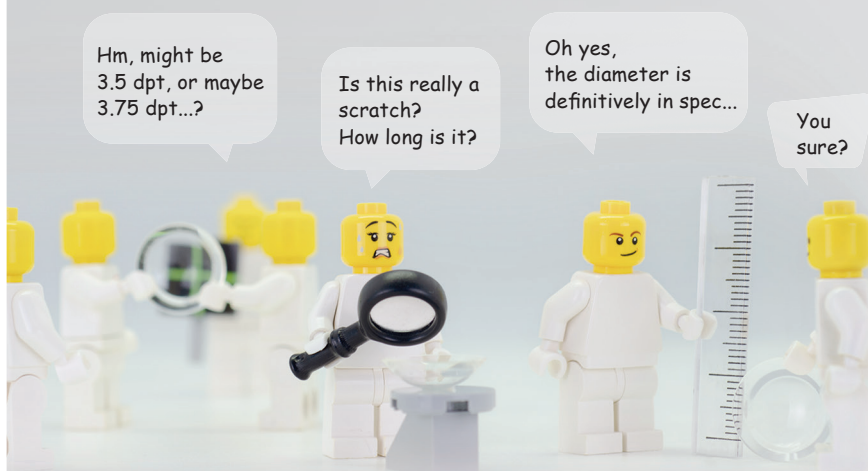
Eef van der Worp, BOptom, PhD, FAAO, FIACLE, FBCLA, FSLS is an educator and researcher. He received his optometry degree from the Hogeschool van Utrecht in the Netherlands (NL) and has served as a head of the contact lens department at the school for over eight years. He received his PhD from the University of Maastricht (NL) in 2008. He is a fellow of the AAO, IACLE, BCLA and the SLS. He is currently adjunct Professor at the University of Montreal University College of Optometry (CA) and adjunct assistant Professor at Pacific University College of Optometry (Oregon, USA). He is lecturing extensively worldwide and is a guest lecturer at a number of Universities in the US and Europe.



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