



# PLUVIUS COMMENT

**H**ERE goes with 2015, which has promise of plenty of news about the ophthalmic professions and industry.

But the year has started with the horrific attack on human decency by the unlamented, now-dead gangsters who killed 17 people in Paris.

To quote from a media commentator: "Make no mistake, the killers of the Charlie Hebdo magazine cartoonists and journalists in Paris intended to silence freedom of speech, freedom of thought and free expression.

"Cartoonists and journalists should not be silenced by threats, intimidation or criminal actions, no matter what the cause or justification, but should continue to fight for all our freedoms – that's our duty to our readers and to our children. Freedoms are too easily lost and too hard won.

"The world is facing a wave of fundamentalism as abhorrent as any repressive and intolerant ideology we've ever witnessed; Nazism, Fascism or Communism. The world has stood up before and it must stand up again now. No more political correctness, no more pretending that appeasement is the answer. Aggressors view appeasement as weakness to be exploited which only emboldens them and their cause.

"Winston Churchill, arguably the greatest western leader of the 20th Century, hit the nail bang on the head when he said. 'An appeaser is one who feeds a crocodile, hoping it will eat him last!'

The world simply cannot be an appeaser – to anyone.

**A**LL of the foaming and frothing about the GP tax and claims that changes to Medicare will force people to delay seeking medical (and optometrical) attention to date seem to have missed the obvious: if the federal government is so short of chips that it has to bring in such an unacceptable tax as the GP tax that was supposedly to raise \$1.3 billion over four years, then surely a more logical way to do that would be to raise the Medicare levy. That would spread the load across the board, with those earning salaries and wages, from big to small, all kicking in, leaving those who can't to do just that until (hopefully) they can in the future.

Initially it would probably be difficult politically, but if the government used the huge resources it has at its disposal to get its reasoning over to the community at large, then it could well be accepted before long.

The only problem is that there doesn't seem to be anybody in the government capable of doing that, from the prime minister (few trust him because of his lies and lies about lies) to the treasurer who can't add up, to the finance minister (desperately needs a good barber) or to the foreign minister (a one-trick show pony). Not that the other side have much talent either.

Regrettably, it looks as though it's going to remain a festering sore for who knows how long.

**I**N the same vein, haven't those optometrists who dispense their own prescriptions

a simple answer to the perceived problems caused by the changes to Medicare that took effect on 1 January?

Simply increase the selling price of the frames and lenses they sell to make up for lost revenue; medical practitioners don't dispense their own prescriptions, so they don't have that same advantage.

Simple, *n'est-ce pas?*

Or is it beyond the wit of the hierarchy to suggest that?

**A**ND would someone please do what they can to discourage professional-association figures and members of the media from using sayings such as 'short-sighted' when referring to cuts to health-care.

It's corny and does no justice to serious issues.

**T**O kick off the year, we introduce a new award – 'The Self-Promoter of the Month', with this blurb the clear winner: "the ... is committed to delivering the best eyecare products, at the best possible price, delivered with exceptional customer service. if (sic) you have been impressed with our service please don't hesitate to recommend us to others."

Modest, isn't it.

**S**INCE ever, optometry has been run by male opto-politicians and academics, but that's fast changing.

There is now a female head of optometry school at The University of New South Wales,

## NEW DETAILS

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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Suburb/Town: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

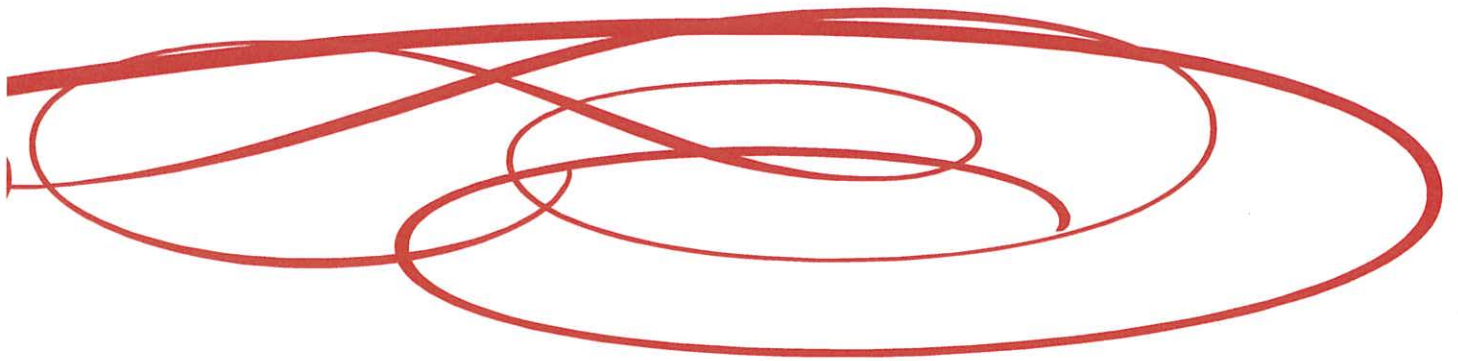
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Fiona Stapleton; a female head of optometry department at The University of Melbourne, Allison, McKendrick; a female chief executive officer of the Australian College of Optometry, Maureen O'Keefe; a female national president of Optometry Australia, Kate Gifford; a female president of NSW/ACT Optometry (the biggest OA division), Christine Craigie; a female chief executive office of OA, Genevieve Quilty; and a female national chief operations manager of OA, Kirsten McMahons-Cook. No doubt there are others.

But they won't have quite arrived until when a toast is proposed to "The Gentlemen" at some posh dinner or other, the ladies present mutter "The Gentlemen, God bless 'em".

**D**ID the majority of optometrists want the right to diagnose and treat glaucoma suspects and those patients already known to have the disease without involvement of ophthalmologists – i.e. bring to an end the co-management system that had been in place for years until the Optometry Board of Australia decided they could?

Probably not; it seems the push came from optometrical academia and professional associations, not from practising optometrists.

In the end, commonsense largely reigned at the settlement meeting held in Brisbane late last year, with the optometry team reluctantly giving all ground to the ophthalmology team when it came to 12 points the meeting considered, with the maximum-four-months-checking-by-an-ophthalmologist rule thrown in to seal the deal.

**P**RIME Minister Tony Abbott's off-sider Peta Credlin has confirmed her intention to enter parliament by denying the prospect.

It's the usual way of the world of politics to deny what you are planning to do, then to do it anyway, uttering the usual 'for the good of mankind/the nation/the government/the whatsit political party/and, most importantly, me.'

But why would she bother? After all, she is the most-powerful woman in Canberra, being co-prime minister in the Credlin-Murdoch-Abbott government.

The jungle drums are beating; Ms Credlin is on the march!

**S**O Peter 'Plod' Dutton has been relieved of his federal health portfolio in the recent ministerial reshuffle, being given the immigration portfolio instead.

His time as health minister was not exactly impressive, as an example witness his

performance when announcing the government was abandoning the \$7 co-payment to see a GP and introducing a \$5 one instead; as unconvincing as imaginable.

The Senate had a different idea and regulation for a \$5 co-payment and at the same time a \$20 cut to GPs' payments was likely to be thrown out when the it resumed next month, so the \$20-cut part of the proposal was abandoned, with the new health minister being the stooge sent out by the prime minister to announce the backdown.

The \$5 co-payment is supposedly still on the agenda, but it will be hard for the government to get it passed by the Senate.

New health minister Sussan Ley is from Albury and is an aviation *aficionado* among other things. She has a reputation for getting things done, something 'Plod' didn't ever have – it was not surprising he was named last month by 46 per cent of readers of *Australian Doctor* as the worst health minister in the past 35 years.

But good luck to the new minister; she's going to need every bit of it.

**W**HAT is it about certain publishers that they cannot resist trying to become part of an event by running around taking photos ad nauseum and in general getting in everybody's way?

When members of the press are invited to attend a function, it's in order to report on proceedings, not to try to look as though they're part of it all.

Is it because they don't understand that simple fact? Or is it that they are dopey? Or is it because they can't resist showing off?

Who knows.

**T**HE brass band at the recent graduation ceremony for new Fellows of The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists was truly a shocker, bringing back memories of school bands, hitting plenty of bum notes as it struggled with the Australian and New Zealand national anthems.

But it was nothing like the brass band at such a ceremony a year or so ago, which, after accompanying the official party's procession as it entered the venue for the graduation ceremony and the two national anthems shot through, never to be seen again!

**F**REE, untrammelled competition believer, the pharmacy profession, is about to be taken on by private hospital operator Ramsay Health Care in an attempt to have overturned laws

limiting ownership of retail pharmacies to pharmacists.

Ramsay has in its sights the 80-year-old rule that keeps everybody else out of pharmacy ownership, following a draft recommendation at the conclusion of a review led by Professor Ian Harper that long-standing restrictions on ownership and location should be removed.

Pushing back against the Harper review's draft recommendations are the Pharmacy Guild of Australia and large corporations such as wholesaler Sigma Pharmaceuticals.

Ramsay wants to be able to open pharmacies in 39 of its 69 Australian hospitals.

The Harper review panel is due to deliver its final report this month.

Wait for the screams if it goes against the Guild *et al*.

**A**NEW development for those with an eye for making a dollar or two: there's a new outfit not far from our office that is purportedly a dental practice but happens to also incorporate a beauty salon – or whatever they call places to make ladies (and blokes?) look as good as possible – and where Botox is freely available.

Given the small fortunes to be made selling wrinkle-eraser Botox, the question is whether the beauty salon is owned by the dental practice or is it the other way around?

**S**PEAKING of which, I notice the hearing aids business (a.k.a. audiology) is coming more and more under the spotlight for what some consider to be dodgy behavior.

It's all to do with the supply of hearing aids following supposed assessment of hearing. In some instances the 'assessment' is only cursory before proceeding to the serious business of pressuring to buy a hearing aid for some eye-watering prices – as much as \$12,000 each.

Yes, there's a code of conduct set out somewhere, but not everyone adheres to it.

It seems it's time for consumer-protection authorities to step in and do something about it, but I wouldn't hold my breath while waiting for that to happen.

**W**ORTH QUOTING:

"We just need to know who is running health policy in this country and what it is ... right now it looks like a total mess."

– Australian Medical Association president, Brian Owler.