

News

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Professor Harrison Weisinger resigns

Professor Weisinger announced his resignation as Director of Optometry and his Chair in Optometry at Victoria's Deakin University on 18 May. His resignation will take effect in July, when Professor Alex

Gentle will take over leadership of optometry at Deakin. Professor Weisinger was the foundation professor of optometry at Deakin. He was appointed in 2011 and had responsibility for establishing the new course, which compresses the equivalent of a five-year course into three and a half years by having three 'semesters' in each year. The first students were enrolled in 2012. Professor Weisinger has had a varied career: he studied optometry at The University of Melbourne and continued to complete MSc and PhD degrees during which time he published some fine research on the role of dietary fatty acids on homeostasis and visual development. He continued his research as an Australian Research Council and the National Health and Medical Research Council funded post-doctoral fellow at several institutions including the Howard Florey Institute. Concurrently, he qualified in medicine, after which he joined the Board of Directors of Specsavers Optometrists, where he headed recruitment and professional services.

A new history of Australian optometry

The Australian College of Optometry has announced it will publish a new history of Australian optometry as part of its commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the College. The book

has been written by Professor Barry Cole AO and is planned for publication in October. It is entitled *A history of Australian optometry: two hundred years beating the tyranny of distance*

and fighting political battles to find new roles and a new place in health care. The author is professor emeritus at The University of Melbourne and was the Director of the Australian College of Optometry for over 30 years. He was Head of the Department of Optometry and Vision Science at The University of Melbourne from 1973 to 1998 and was appointed the foundation Professor of Optometry at the University in 1978. The book is the successor to Charles Wright's *History of Australian optometry* published in 1988 and covers a wider time span from 1800 to the present day. It is a lively narrative which explores the what, why, who and how of the evolution of optometry in a changing social and political landscape.

Teenage optometry student designed the Australian Flag

The Kett Optometry Museum of the Australian College of Optometry has discovered that one of the designers of the Australian flag was an optometrist. When the States of Australia federated to become the Commonwealth of Australia on January 1 1901, there was a need for the new nation to have a flag. Melbourne's *Herald* newspaper conducted a design competition in 1900 but it was superseded by an official government competition announced in April 1901. It attracted 32,823 entries competing for the £75 prize money, about \$10,000 in today's money. The two competitions were merged. Five almost identical entries were chosen as the winning design and shared the prize money. One of them was Lesley John Hawkins, who at the time was a teenager apprenticed to an optician in Sydney. Hawkins (1883–1966) completed his apprenticeship and later moved to Melbourne, probably about 1911, to practise optometry at 218 High Street, Northcote. When the *Victorian Opticians Registration Act*

was passed in December 1935, he applied for registration as an optometrist and was registered on 31 August 1936 on the basis of his prior experience in optometry. He was issued with certificate No. 133. He had no formal qualifications, which is not surprising since the first qualifications by examination were not introduced until 1912 in NSW and 1913 in Victoria. In his application for registration, he claimed to be practising optometry solely, which means he was not also a watchmaker, jeweller or chemist, as was not uncommon at that time. He also claimed he had been the principal of the practice in Northcote for 25 years.^a

The University of Melbourne collaborations

A Memorandum of Understanding was signed in Chennai between The University of Melbourne and the Medical Research Foundation (Sankara Nethralaya), Chennai, India, on the 7 January 2015. The initiating parties were the Department of Optometry and Vision Sciences at The University of Melbourne and the Elite School of Optometry at Sankara Nethralaya. The occasion also included the inauguration of a neuro-optometry clinic by the Chennai institution, which will involve ophthalmologists, optometrists and neurologists in research, diagnosis and management of ocular problems arising from brain injury. Sankara Nethralaya is a not-for-profit institution for ophthalmic care, research and education founded in 1978. It provides ophthalmological and optometrical training, the latter being provided by the Elite School of Optometry. Sankara Nethralaya has 1,000 employees and serves 250,000 patients a year and performs 100 surgeries a day.

The second collaboration is between Melbourne optometry and the Royal Melbourne Hospital (RMH). The Hospital has established a satellite ophthalmological service at the University Optometry Clinic. The goals are to increase services for eye outpatients of RMH and to enhance clinical experience of optometry students.

^a Summary record of all the first applicants for registration in Victoria in 1936. Kett Optometry Museum Cat No. 0889.