

## Gain endorsement with online program

ABOUT 150 optometrists are undertaking their therapeutic qualifications online and another 42 have been the first to qualify in the Australian College of Optometry's Certificate in Ocular Therapeutics (ACO-COT).

The Optometry Board of Australia figures released in June show that 41 per cent or 2,000 Australian optometrists are now therapeutically endorsed.

The ACO-COT is the first online course in Australia that enables scheduled medicines endorsement for registered optometrists. Content is delivered by an expert team of national and international presenters via flexible methods including online lectures from a panel of 30 lecturers, webinars and forums.

Participants also undertake 50 hours of clinical placement with ophthalmologists.

The ACO's general manager professional development Jolanda de Jong said candidates were from all over Australia with most from Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland.

'We have also had 13 candidates from New Zealand and we even have candidates who study the theoretical part while residing in India and China,' she said.

The first group graduated at the ACO's annual meeting in May, Sydney optometrist **Conor Davis**, who started the course in April, qualified in Glasgow, Scotland in 2011, and came to Australia to practise for a change in environment.

'I am genuinely enjoying the course, and the ophthalmologists who are giving their time to do the lectures, particularly the live webinars, are great. It is a fantastic way for us to pick their brains at a more personal level than most optometrists would get a chance to do,' he said.

'I dealt with the college originally when doing my OCANZ (Optometry Council of Australia and New Zealand) exams which allow optometrists qualified overseas to practise here.

'Scotland does a post-graduate therapeutic course also that I would have done, as we do not come out of university

'I was also motivated because I am relatively young with no kids at this stage and will be practising for many more decades, so I thought I would do it sooner rather than later. The part-time aspect of the course is great and gives me time to work full-time and enjoy an active sporting and social life.'

Mr Davis hopes the course will allow him to treat patients with relatively less severe conditions that he would usually refer to an ophthalmologist or eye emergency department, building in his patients better rapport and trust in him.

'While it is very important for optometrists to understand our limitations with our patients, over time with experience, with shared-care schemes and guidance from local ophthalmologists, courses such as the ACO-COT will allow a better ocular health care system for all patients Australia wide,' he said.

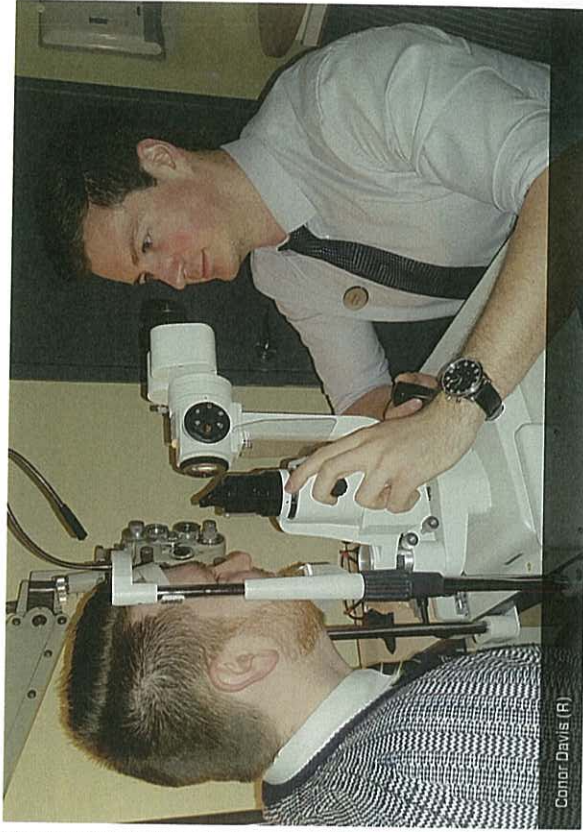
Brisbane optometrist **Lauren Herring** heard about the course through her employer, Optometry Australia president **Kate Gifford**. Lauren started the course in April and is due to finish next April.

'I was motivated to study for therapeutic endorsement as I see many contact lens wearers in our practice and unfortunately that means inevitably I see eye infections,' she said.

'As I am a recent graduate from QUT—in 2011—I have many years ahead of me in this profession so I figured I should enrol ASAP. I expect to learn a lot then put it into practice to benefit my patients with faster access to therapeutic eye care should the need arise.

'I enjoy the online format of lectures and webinars as it allows me the freedom to study in my own time and still work full time.

'Although there is no person to person contact, I don't feel isolated from my colleagues or the lectures as the online presence allows me to seek support, ask questions or generally hear about how my fellow students are managing with the study and work load.



Connor Davis (R)

## Keratoconus and drug delivery

NEW ZEALAND refractive surgeon and ophthalmologist Dr Sue Ormonde will deliver a key address on the refractive treatment of keratoconus at the Australian College of Optometry's national conference this month.

Dr Ormonde will also lead a discussion on cutting-edge treatments in anterior segment surgery and lecture on new ideas in cataract surgery.

Head of drug delivery at the Centre for Eye Research Australia, Dr Hong Zhang, will give the other key presentation,

on new modes of drug delivery. Dr Zhang's drug delivery research focuses on investigating non-invasive and targeted tools, treatment options and technologies, for age-related macular degeneration, glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy.

The ACO's head of primary and specialist care services, optometrist Roman Serebrianiuk, will facilitate an interactive contact lens management symposium with Professor Eric Papas and Russell Lowe.

An optional pre-conference program, which covers an

introduction to OCT and interpretation of OCT data, will be conducted at the college on 23 October.

The full conference program offers up to 63 CPD points. The two days at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on 24-25 October offer 45 CPD points including 22.5 therapeutic points. There will also be a trade display and cocktail party at which Emeritus Professor Barry Cole's book *A History of Australian Optometry* will be launched.

For enquiries call 03 9349 7477 or email cpd@aco.org.au.

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