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Ophthalmology and Therapy: Reflecting on 2020 and Embracing the Challenges of 2021

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ABSTRACT

2020 will forever be marked as a year that brought with it an unprecedented number of challenges for the healthcare community. COVID-19 had monumental effects on all fields, including ophthalmology. Considering this we are truly thankful for all of the support we have received, despite the pressures brought about by the pandemic. We are very grateful to our Editorial and Advisory boards who have continued to offer their advice, to our authors for working with us to help publish their work, and to our readers for engaging with our content. The Editorial below has been authored by *Ophthalmology and Therapy's* EU Editor-in-Chief Professor Tariq Aslam. Professor Aslam writes about his aspirations for the healthcare and ophthalmology community in 2021, and how the journal hopes to play its part in facing these challenges.

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DIGITAL FEATURES

This article is published with digital features to facilitate understanding of the article. To view digital features for this article go to <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.13606577>.

EDITORIAL

Evidence suggests that the year 2021 will unfortunately be as turbulent and challenging as its predecessor—the direct medical impacts of COVID may gradually diminish, but only to expose immense challenges for our remaining health services, education and wider economy. Equally important are the problems of climate change and environmental protection that must now be urgently addressed.

Although these problems are considerable, we should be heartened through witness to the human spirit of ingenuity and drive demonstrating the potential of various novel and intelligent scientific solutions. Perhaps the greatest threat to us all then is a third tranche of concerns, those that could hinder such enlightened academic proposals, whether through inefficient and obstructive procedural requirements or difficulties in implementing

due to poor public understanding. We know, for example, that delivery of vaccines to counter the COVID threat required unprecedented streamlining of procedures which was made possible whilst still maintaining scientific rigour and safety. Widespread public misinformation and lack of awareness could yet act to undermine the efficacy of such vaccination plans, as well as other public health and green initiatives—suspicion of expert views and poor understanding of what constitutes facts may effectively build a wall between the public and enactment of intelligent government policies.

In a relatively small specialty such as ophthalmology it may be tempting to assume that instigating significant change is the responsibility of others. However, with no less than the survival of our planet and people at stake, it is imperative that the challenges above are embraced by all of us in whatever field or vocation we find ourselves in 2021.

On the part of our journal and the role we can play we are aware of the need to streamline unnecessary burdens of research endeavours wherever possible whilst maintaining scientific rigour and safety. We will continue our strong record of rapid and efficient review and publication that values author time and allows rapid dissemination of scientific findings. For example, in early 2020 we launched a topical collection on “COVID-19 and its Implications for Ophthalmology” https://link.springer.com/journal/40123/topicalCollection/AC_9d7958625ac2b30ea307298280c1f84a/page/1, rapidly reacting and building upon the information available, whilst retaining a thorough peer review process. We encourage viewpoints investigating broader research infrastructure with the aims of improving efficiency in ophthalmic care. We will particularly seek this year to disseminate papers on current crucial issues including green initiatives in ophthalmology and evidence for practical measures that can have positive environmental impact. We encourage reports shifting from theoretical potential of technologies such as AI and gene therapy towards their effective implementation to improve patient care in the current socioeconomic climate. Indeed, we encourage all scientific reports on efficient and pragmatic ways of managing the different direct and indirect

effects of COVID such as more effective home monitoring and lower reliance on expensive specialist hospital care. In addition to modulating the scope of our publications we are able to publish digital features and plain language summaries to assist readers in the interpretation of published articles, and increase their educational value. Last year, we published a set of guidelines <https://www.springer.com/journal/40123/submission-guidelines> to help authors create and submit both digital features and plain language summaries. Applying such principles to our journal may be only a small step, but if taken up across the scientific community they might be a useful beginning in instigating constructive change as well as stemming the tide of public misinformation.

It is clear we need to think differently, following the inspiring example of colleagues in vaccine development, to improve efficiency in research systems even if this involves abandoning long-accepted norms. We must look for bloated inefficiencies in our respective areas and seek to challenge these to find new and more efficient ways to put research findings into practice. We will need all our time and efforts to be concentrated on the very real problems ahead if we want to succeed in our challenge to change the course of history over 2021.

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Compliance with Ethics Guidelines. This article is based on previously conducted studies and does not contain any studies with human participants or animals performed by any of the authors.

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