



# REBOUNDED AND BUILDING MOMENTUM

“Crises and deadlocks when they occur have at least this advantage, that they force us to think.”

—Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of India, 1947 to 1964



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When the COVID-19 pandemic erupted in Northern Italy in February 2020, it left no less—albeit different—destruction than a level 5 tornado. The death toll, economic crisis, and social changes associated with it devastated normal life, and the consequences for the future remain unpredictable. Ophthalmologists in the public system were redeployed to hospitals to work in the COVID-19 units, and those in private practice had neither patients to work up nor surgeries to perform other than urgent and emergent cases. The stall lasted months.

The devastation of the pandemic is undeniable, but it also left us with a gift. Ophthalmologists around the world were forced to reinvent their practices, reorganize patient flow, and implement new ideas and approaches to reach patients. The changes made by practices to keep their doors open had a surprising effect: Procedural volume, particularly for refractive procedures, increased by percentages not seen since the early 2000s.<sup>1</sup>

As the world reopens, it's reasonable to expect that competition for disposable funds will resurface, threatening to slow and potentially reverse the growth in procedural volume that occurred from 2020 to 2021. Patients have short memories. (We've all seen just how soon after LASIK they forget the vision they had before surgery.) If the dynamics that have driven patients to our practices for the past 2 years—fogging glasses, computer-related eye strain, and worsening ocular surface disease—dissipate, the number of patients who seek our care for these problems will decrease. Further, individuals' desire to spend their money on elective surgical procedures will compete with their pent-up desires to take a dream vacation, dine out at restaurants, and otherwise enjoy life again.

It's up to us to champion surgical vision correction and keep the momentum going. We must think about how to overcome the (one hopes) postpandemic challenges and devise fresh ideas to attract and better serve patients with more impressive results so that they can enjoy their lives to the fullest. Approaches may span patient outreach strategies, technological improvements, data usage, and higher education.

All stakeholders—industry, media, ophthalmologists, academics, and educators—must raise the bar together. Collectively, we must abandon competitive strategies such as branding procedures in ways that confuse patients and serve only to shift market share in a stagnant market. Let's instead develop nomenclature that can be shared globally and used to educate patients and grow the market. Additionally, the development of globally recognized programs can help to qualify ophthalmologists as the specialists of refractive surgery.

We invited a group of experts and stakeholders in various areas of ophthalmology to address topics and share solutions that can have a positive impact on our future and that of our patients. Their contributions exceeded our expectations. We hope you enjoy reading about their ideas and, most importantly, adopt their vision for the future of refractive vision correction. ■