

REFRACTIVE SURGERY

# Recession dampens demand for surgery

New refractive surgery clinics continue to open in the UK, although growth in the sector slowed this year as the recession dampened demand.

Optician's ninth annual survey of clinics in the UK and Ireland identified 138 locations in the UK, 10 more than last year and an increase of 8 per cent compared to a 22 per cent rise in 2008.

All three of the major groups – Optical Express, Optimax and Ultralase – opened new sites this year and some private and hospital-based clinics also expanded. In Ireland, the groups increased their presence with Ultralase's acquisition of Eye Laser Ireland, but at least one clinic there closed.

Increased use of wavefront and femtosecond treatments, and more demand for intraocular surgery, are the main trends this year and other techniques such as corneal cross-linking for keratoconus are becoming more widely used.

Despite reports of downward pressure on prices, average charges for Lasik as quoted by



Optegra is the first clinic in Europe to offer a new treatment for advanced AMD

our sample were slightly up at £951 per eye compared to £916 last year. But prices ranged 'from £395' at two of the major groups to £2,300 per eye at a Harley Street clinic.

Most clinics say the economy is likely to further impact the market in 2010 but several companies have plans for expansion. This week private investment company Moonray Healthcare said it had raised \$60m to expand the Surrey-based clinic Optegra and create seven new hospitals in several countries over the next 18 months, including sites in the Solent and Manchester.

Chief executive of Moonray

Healthcare Tim Clover said Optegra aimed to become the market leader in the developing market for implantable lenses.

Optegra opened in Guildford a year ago and is the first in Europe to offer a new treatment for advanced age-related macular degeneration. The Lipschitz Macular Implant (LMI) is implanted behind the iris and incorporates a telescopic effect to magnify images entering the eye. The lens is exclusive to Optegra and treatment costs £7,500 per eye.

● See pages 24-30 for the full survey and a directory of 125 clinics taking part this year.

RESEARCH

## Study takes a long view

Biological, social and economic factors can all contribute to visual impairment in middle-aged adults according to the results of a new study.

Published in the October issue of *Ophthalmology*, the research observed a cohort of 9,330 people born in 1958 who underwent ophthalmic assessment at the age of 44 or 45. Subjects' distance, near and stereo visual acuity was assessed and compared to their employment, socioeconomic and marital status as well as their general health.

Results showed that 90.9 per cent of subjects had normal vision in both eyes, but 1.3 per cent had socially significant visual impairment and 0.9 per cent were deemed visually impaired or blind. Those with impaired vision were more likely to have mothers who smoked during pregnancy and to have had low socioeconomic status as a child, as well as poorer general and mental health.

The study's authors said the findings suggested visual function in adult life may be influenced directly by key parental and childhood biological and social determinants of general health.

CONTACT LENSES

# Chemical fire disrupts production at Vista

A 24-hour fire at a Widnes-based recycling company has caused smoke damage to the contact lens materials manufacturer Vista Optics.

The fire started at 12.30am on November 17, destroying a building that contained chemicals, waste oils and dry cell batteries.

David Walker, Vista managing director, said: 'The effect on the local environment was not good, with local home owners, including some of our

staff, being kept awake all night by random explosions as the various products were ignited. Thankfully there were no casualties or reports of injury.'

Walker added that the inside and outside of the Vista building had been professionally cleaned, and all stock and work in progress had been relocated to temporary premises and fully repackaged as a precaution.

The company's established disaster recovery plan was



The burnt out building of the neighbouring recycling business

implemented although some logistical problems meant there would be minimal delays on shipments. 'The production laboratories may take up to one week to be back in production but we can use premium time thereafter to catch up within a short period of time,' he said just after the fire.

'I confidently predict that 99 per cent of our customers will not notice any difference in our level of customer service.'

Walker thanked the Cheshire Fire Service and Constabulary for their prompt action that ensured the Vista building was made secure and minimised the damage to surrounding properties, as well as thanking staff for their dedication.