

Re:View

Keeping excellence in your sights | April 2016 | Issue 25

Super supervision

Tips for supervisors and students

A chance to develop your skills

The SMC Tech Fast Track for FBDOs

Profile feature on Charlotte Hough

We find out about Charlotte and her research

Meet the technicians

Interviews with Mark Turner and Emma Pynn



Super supervision

Tips on how to make the most of your time as a supervised student and to build a great relationship with your supervisor.

Your time as a student can have ups and downs, and a good supervisor can make all the difference. Working with an experienced practitioner who is there to guide you really can be the thing that gets you through the hard times, and inspires you to see what you can achieve.

Examiner and former supervisor Kay Bagshaw says the key values you both need to hold on to throughout the supervision period are, "availability, commitment to each other, openness, approachability and mutual respect." These themes run through all the tips shared by students and supervisors below.

Advice for supervisors

1 Optometrist Kelly Playhay has experienced a pre-reg period as both a DO and an optometrist. She says to supervisors: "Spend time with your pre reg. Have regular meetings even if they only last twenty minutes

per week. Specifying a time set aside to deal with the week's learning and/or questions from your pre-reg is essential. **You have to have such in depth communication, and only then will you develop as an eye care practitioner, whether as a DO, CLO or optometrist."**

2 Alicia Thompson BSc(Hons) FBDO R (Hons)SLD SMC(Tech) is director of professional examinations for ABDO. She says, "My ultimate tip is probably the hardest to achieve in today's busy practices, and that is to make regular time for the trainee! This could involve setting small practical tasks, appraising communication skills, prescription analysis, looking over the portfolio and giving honest but constructive feedback."

3 Michael Welsh is a DO and supervisor practising in Glasgow. He reminds us that we have:

If you want more input to help you develop as a supervisor, or make the most of the student-supervisor experience, Miranda Richardson says, "Attend the available training from ABDO. We present at the colleges to students and supervisors to keep them up to date on what is expected from both supervisors and students."

If you are studying with ABDO College, staff are always willing to help resolve any issues relating to supervision. And if you have tips to share, search for ABDO on Facebook and join in the discussion.

"Two ears, one mouth. I always try to listen carefully to the student's needs before opening my big mouth! Add in empathy, support & enthusiastic encouragement washed down with a substantial sense of humour! I have found that this is not just great for supervision, it is also the recipe for many successful business relationships!"

Advice for students

1 Tristan Lowes is now at the end of his second pre-reg period, this time as a pre-reg optometrist. He says, "What I have found helpful is when my supervisors say that there are no stupid questions – they'd much rather we clarified that I was doing things correctly than I carried on without asking. From a pre-reg's point of view, you should try to make a diagnosis or plan before you talk to your supervisor. It doesn't matter if it's wrong: your supervisor is there to guide you and if you get it right then you know you're improving. I was fortunate enough to be able to make friends with my primary supervisor which helped a lot as it gave us a relaxed approach if I ever had any problems, I felt I could be more open and honest if I was struggling." He adds, "Researching problem areas first has helped me build my knowledge and confidence and I've always had the approach that my supervisor isn't there to do my job and theirs, they're there to guide me when I need it."

ABDO College expands its academic team

2 Miranda Richardson BSc(Hons), FBDO, is ABDO's assistant director of professional examinations, and she says, "As a trainee, communication with the supervisor is key. If you feel that there is an issue, find the time to speak to your supervisor about it. Book time if the practice is busy: sometimes a few minutes over a cup of coffee at the start of the day can help you find a way through something that seemed insurmountable the previous evening."

3 Michael Parker says: "As a current student I would ask for someone that is available for any questions (we have loads). Perhaps set aside some time each week to go over assignments and questions that they have written down during the week."

4 Chris Murphey is a supervisor and practises at Specsavers. He advises, "I'm not a mind-reader, if you say you understand something I will have assume you get it and don't need help."

5 Student DO Sophia Haych is currently waiting for her results. She says, "You need a supervisor who isn't patronising and can be approached when needed and genuinely shows an interest."



I'm delighted to introduce this issue of *Re:View* by welcoming two new lecturers to the ABDO College academic team; Simon Butterfield

BSc FBDO and Katie Nicholls BSc(Hons) FBDO, both former ABDO College students, joined the team in February. It's good to see the academic team steadily expanding as the College continues to grow and I would like to take this opportunity to wish both of them every success in their new roles.

In this edition of *Re:View* there are valuable tips for both students and their supervisors and we find out how DOs can benefit from the Fast Track Technician Training for FBDOs course, that leads to

the SMC(Tech) qualification. There's also a profile feature on Charlotte Hough and her research into macular damage associated with long-term Tamoxifen use, as well as interviews with the two College technicians, Mark Turner and Emma Pynn.

ABDO College will be present at Optrafair, 9–11 April at the Birmingham NEC, so if you attend the show please be sure to come and visit the ABDO College stand, Q68, where our team will be happy to welcome you and update you on our courses, and the publications available from ABDO College Bookshop.

Angela McNamee

BSc(Hons) MCOptom FBDO (Hons) CL FBCLA Cert Ed

Chairman,

ABDO College Board of Trustees

Contents

2–3 Profile feature on Charlotte Hough

3–4 An investigation into the prevalence of macular damage associated with long-term Tamoxifen use

5–7 Meet the technicians

8–9 A chance to develop your skills as a DO with the SMC Tech Fast Track

ABDO College

Godmersham Park, Godmersham, Canterbury, Kent CT4 7DT

tel: 01227 738 829 option 1 | fax: 01227 733 910

info@abdocollege.org.uk | www.abdocollege.org.uk

Regulated by the
General Optical Council
www.optical.org

Charlotte Hough

We find out about Charlotte and her research

Charlotte Hough has recently graduated from ABDO College with her BSc (Hons) in Ophthalmic Dispensing. In this article you can find out how Charlotte became interested in optics, learn more about her time and ABDO College, and discover how she picked her topic for her third year project: *'An investigation into the prevalence of macular damage associated with long-term Tamoxifen use'*.

Like many DOs, Charlotte didn't plan on going into the world of optics. She says, "When I left school, I had no idea what I wanted to do. I worked as a waitress and barmaid, but was looking for something that would use my brain. I saw an advert for an optical adviser at Specsavers, with training included. I really enjoyed it. The in-house training was good, I picked things up quickly and progressed. After a while I wanted more training than Specsavers could offer at the time so I went to work for an independent. I'd been in the field for four years, I wanted to learn more, so I was looking at the DO course. It was actually at a family event where an old family friend encouraged me to go for it. I went home, googled, and found ABDO College. That was the first point I discovered a degree was available. When the information pack came through and I found out about the BSc, I thought that it seemed silly not to take the opportunity. For a small amount of extra work, I would have the chance to get a degree for myself and to future-proof my career."

It is always nerve wracking starting a new course. Charlotte says, "Before my

first block release, I was terrified. My dad drove me down to the student accommodation. I picked that accommodation as a way to get to know other students and eliminate worries about travel to and from the College each day. When I got there, Rachel welcomed me, and within half an hour I realised everyone was in the same boat, old or young. We all had the same uncertainties and it was nice to hear other people's experiences of madcap patients and lenses we use. I realised that these people were just like me."



Charlotte Hough

Studying always has its highs and lows. Charlotte says, "In 2013 there were a number of illnesses in my family – my step dad had brain surgery – and I thought 'I can't do this'. I spoke to the staff, and in particular Jo Underwood: they were very supportive. I also changed practices mid-way through the course which was stressful. There were difficult days but friends, students, staff and family all picked me up and kept me going. I had my low points, but they made me realise that even though I was miles from Godmersham I had lots of support." A high point for Charlotte was always block release. She says, "It was intense, hard work to fit in a semester of work for two weeks. But if there was something that you were stuck on there was always someone to go through it with you. I missed home: despite that it was well worth going. I found looking at common eye conditions very interesting – in practice I would have always referred straight on to the optometrist.

My experience of in-house training was about lenses and customer service, and the course went way beyond that. Because I was enjoying learning about pathology, disease cropped up much more when talking to patients. There seemed to be a gap in practice in the level of support available to a patient, so I learned more about multidisciplinary care. A lady who had treatment for breast cancer had been told she couldn't have an eye test or glasses, but she asked me why. I couldn't answer then, but I wanted to find out, and researching that made me think that

there needed to be more in-practice understanding of treatments that were becoming more common where we needed to advise patients. Should we say, 'there's no point in changing your glasses now', or 'we should monitor you more frequently'?" This initial interest led to Charlotte's research project. She says, "I found that since tamoxifen has been used since the seventies, a lot of the research was much older than I had hoped. However once I found my first couple of articles, I could trace the papers they cited. It was a huge amount of research and reading. Now, if someone comes in and is on tamoxifen, I can explain that ocular complications are very rare. The positive sides of taking Tamoxifen far outweigh its risks. I have advised patients to have more frequent eye tests so we can monitor them. Currently there is a lot of pressure on ophthalmology departments so they can't monitor every person who is taking a drug that may or may not affect their eyes, and optical practices can fill that gap."

Reflecting on her time as a student, Charlotte says, "I'm really happy now passed my exams. There were times when I didn't think I'd reach this point. I love it every time a member of staff says 'I'll take you over to our dispensing optician'. In the future I'm interested in taking an active role in the Area, and working with the LOC. From doing my dissertation I've found a gap in multidisciplinary care and I'd like to support patients and grow the role of the dispensing optician. In a few years I'd like to be supporting students too."

An investigation into the prevalence of macular damage associated with long-term Tamoxifen use

By Charlotte Hough BSc(Hons) FBDO

INTRODUCTION

The General Optical Council (GOC, 2010) has outlined the important role that the dispensing optician (DO) must play in ophthalmic practice. With a duty of care, DOs must have an understanding of drugs and health conditions which may affect the patient's ocular health, as well as being able to give clear and accurate advice.

Tamoxifen is an antioestrogen drug used to treat breast cancer, although occasionally high doses may be used in the treatment of brain malignancies. The British National Formulary (BNF, 2014) record blurred and reduced vision as a potential, although, rare side effect.

AIM

The research was to determine the prevalence of macular damage in patients taking Tamoxifen for extended periods. In 2011, there were 331,487 cases of cancer in the United Kingdom, of which 15 per cent were breast cancer. By gaining more knowledge and understanding of treatments and potential associated ocular complications, it will be possible for a DO to advise patient's accordingly.

METHOD

Once the topic area was selected, keywords and search terms were used to find suitable literature. An extensive literature review was performed, using online academic databases including Google Scholar and Science Direct, with four academic articles selected for analysis. Critical frameworks were utilised so that the data could be systematically assessed. Information in academic journals and textbooks were also reviewed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Zafeiropoulos *et al* (2014) presented the case record of a 41 year old, who had been treated with 20mg daily of Tamoxifen for six years. Having presented with bilateral loss of vision and severe macular oedema, the Tamoxifen was immediately discontinued. Reduced central macular thicknesses were found using Optical Coherence Tomography

(OCT) and cavity spaces were present bilaterally. As the oedema was detected early, the patient was treated with acetazolamide and napafenac drops for one month. Upon follow up visits, the patient had improved visual acuities and retinal thicknesses had returned to normal parameters within two months.

There are limitations to this study, most noticeably that it only considers a single patient. The reduced VAs and oedema may have occurred for reasons other than Tamoxifen toxicity, with the improvement being due to the treatment drugs and not the discontinuation of the Tamoxifen. Due to the methods used for the study, no data analysis was presented and the validity and reliability of the study could not be determined. However, the article does draw upon previous studies to support the conclusion that the oedema was a result of Tamoxifen toxicity.

Another study, which made use of OCT screening, was Doshi *et al's* (2014) case analysis of three female patients taking Tamoxifen. All three patients were receiving daily 20mg doses, with high cumulative doses. All presented with some vision loss and distortions and had no history of ocular conditions associated with Cystoid Macular Oedema (CME). The study recommends that all patients started on Tamoxifen should have baseline screenings performed and that an ophthalmic team should monitor patients using OCT.

Bourla *et al* (2007) presented three case records of males receiving high doses of Tamoxifen for treatment of brain malignancies. Once again, OCT images were provided to illustrate the damage they believed to be caused by Tamoxifen toxicity. Each of the three patients presented with reduced VAs following high cumulative doses of Tamoxifen (219g–876g) and were given a thorough fundus examination and OCT screening. All three patients were found to have the presence of crystalline maculopathy and leakages associated with CME. The case study gives minimal detail for each of the three patients, although there were images from the fundus and OCT screening provided. Again, the authors concluded that the Tamoxifen caused the maculopathy.



As with the previous two articles, there is no disputing that the patients have had high cumulative doses of Tamoxifen, and have experienced CME and other maculopathy. However, due to the case series approach of each study, none of them provided empirical data proving the correlation. All three studies recommend the monitoring of the ocular health of patients taking Tamoxifen.

Conversely, Parkkari *et al* (2003) drew the opposite conclusion. The randomised control trial (RCT) compared the ocular side effects of Tamoxifen and a newer cancer treatment, Toremifene. Sixty patients were randomly assigned into one of two groups. Davis (2011) states that an RCT is the gold standard for research, making this study higher on the hierarchy of evidence than the previous three discussed here. The subjects had systematic follow-ups, and an experienced ophthalmic examiner, who was blind to the drug the patient was receiving, performed the examinations. The examinations included slit-lamp assessment of the cornea, crystalline lens, macula and retina. Intraocular pressures and visual acuities were also recorded. No OCT or fundus imaging was used. Several cases of macular drusen were found during the study. However, all of these had resolved six months after discontinuation.

Although the results presented show little evidence of ocular damage caused by Tamoxifen, the study has several weaknesses. Firstly, the selection of subjects was limited, with only 28 receiving Tamoxifen. In addition, the study only monitored patients for a maximum of three years.

CONCLUSION

From the studies currently available, it is possible to conclude that while very rare, there is a potential for Tamoxifen-induced maculopathy, CME and crystalline deposits. Conflicting options and varying methods of study mean that it was not possible for conclusive, empirical data to be found. However, enough case records were available, showing similar macular changes, to conclude there is some risk.

Further research is recommended to determine the prevalence of ocular complications. Baseline readings should be taken for all patients prior to commencement of the drug, so that existing conditions may be eliminated.

A survey of ophthalmic professionals performed by the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB, 2013) found 81 per cent believe their departments are not able to meet the current demand. This means that patients may need to be monitored at their optical practice. Therefore, it is vital for DOs to have an understanding of the risks, and the ability to advise patients accordingly.

From the recommendations of the studies reviewed, DOs should advise patients taking Tamoxifen the importance of regular eye examinations, and recommend fundus photography and OCT screening where available, along with the importance of attending the practice should they notice a reduction in their vision.

REFLECTION

Discussing potential side effects of any drug must be done with care. The benefits of Tamoxifen are clear and undoubtedly outweigh the small risk of maculopathy or CME. Therefore, when discussing the risks with a patient it is important that it be made clear how rarely these complications occur.

Further research should be undertaken to aid in the discussion with patients. Depending on the patient's prognosis, they may be in any of the stages of grief (Kübler-Ross, 2014). Therefore, it is important for the DO to consider the patient's emotional state before discussing the potential side effects of a drug therapy.

A DO plays a vital part in the care of a patient's ocular health and is often available to have longer discussions with a patient, and answer difficult questions. This research highlighted that it is not just of ocular conditions that one should have an understanding. In order to provide the best care for the patients, an understanding of the potential ocular complications of any common disease or illness is required.

REFERENCES

- Bourla, D., Sarraf, D. and Schwartz, S. (2007) 'Peripheral retinopathy and maculopathy in high-dose tamoxifen', *American Journal of Ophthalmology*, 144(1), Pg. 126–128. [Online] DOI: 10.1016/j.ajo.2007.03.023 (Accessed: 11 January 2015)
- Davis, N. (2011) 'Evidence based practice: aspiring to achieve quality' in *Learning Skills for Nursing Students*. Exeter: Learning Matters Ltd.
- Doshi, R., Fortun, J., Kim, B., Dubovy, S. and Rosenfeld, P. (2014) 'Pseudocystic foveal cavitation in Tamoxifen retinopathy', *American Journal of Ophthalmology*, 157(6), Pg. 1291–1298. [Online] DOI: 10.1016/j.ajo.2014.02.046 (Accessed: 11 January 2015)
- General Optical Council (2010) Code of Conduct [Online] Available at: https://www.optical.org/en/Standards/Standards_for_individuals.cfm (Accessed: 3 June 2015)
- Joint Formulary Committee (2014) *British National Formulary*, 68th Edition. London: Pharmaceutical Press.
- Kübler-Ross, E. (2014) *On Death and Dying: What the dying have to teach doctors, nurses, clergy and their own families*. New York: Scribner.
- Parkkari, M., Paakkala, A., Salminen, L. and Holli, K. (2003) 'Ocular side effects in breast cancer patients treated with tamoxifen and toremifene: a randomised follow-up study', *Acta Ophthalmologica Scandinavica*, 81(5), Pg. 495–499. [Online] DOI: 10.1034/j.1600-0420.2003.00116.x (Accessed: 27 January 2015)
- Royal National Institute of Blind People (2013) *Saving Money, Losing Sight*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.rnib.org.uk/campaigning-policy-and-reports-hub-eye-health/eye-health-reports> (Accessed: 7 July 2015)
- Zafeiropoulos, P., Nanos, P., Tsigkoulis, E. and Stefaniotou, M. (2014) 'Bilateral macular oedema in a patient treated with Tamoxifen: A case report and review of the literature', *Case Reports in Ophthalmology*, 5, Pg. 451–454. [Online] DOI: 10.1159/000370144. (Accessed: 12 January 2015)

Meet the technicians

An interview with Mark Turner and Emma Pynn

In our regular series of interviews with people who you may meet when studying at ABDO College, we interview our technicians, Mark Turner FBDO, Technician and Emma Pynn SMC(Tech), Junior Technician.



Mark Turner

Mark Turner is the College technician at ABDO College. In this article you can find out about Mark's experience and background in optics, as well as how being a DJ has helped his optical career!

Mark's first job was in a bakery. He says, "I'd been a baker for two years, but was developing an allergy to flour. I went to the careers office thinking that I was young enough to develop another career. The careers officer pointed me towards a place interviewing for an optical trainee technician. They wanted someone to start the next Monday, so I suggested they give me a try!" Mark embraced the transition from baking to

optics. He says, "I remember walking into the stock room on my first day. It was a huge room full of lenses. The business supplied optical practices in the area and it was daunting! However, I soon got to grips with the transposition, decentration and technical equipment. Fortunately my employer had years of experience and taught me the practical skills I still use today; the SMC courses weren't as well-known as they are now.

Glazing technology has advanced so much since I started in a workshop, back then we would use a pattern maker, so I'd cut lenses to the shape of the frames. It was all good grounding – I had to file the pattern formers and make the shapes smooth, which even now gives me the hand-eye coordination for hand-edging. I remember the gold filled halfeye readers being a tricky one, often dispensed with glass lenses. We used to do soldering, and use all sorts of mechanisms to repair frames, sunken joints, pinning frames, for example. Some of these things you don't see as much nowadays."

After serving a four year apprenticeship Stott Opticians contacted me to set up their workshop. The Briot 6000 Scanform made my workload easier than in my previous lab, although it was a 2D scan form there was no longer the need for a pattern maker. As I was the only person

in the lab, the technology helped. Developing the business enabled us to employ more staff; this again was great grounding for me, as we enhanced our services. I recall the Skylet Road tint being popular around this time. Frames had become cheaper so we had a budget range and we could offer a new affordable frame instead of a repair and the need for soldering became less."

After nine years, Mark felt like he needed a change. He says, "I had a friend who had a couple of practises in Preston who wanted to build his own workshop. I started with a WECO CAD 4, similar to one we have here at the College. And that came with a frame tracer, it was a bit more advanced than the Briot 6000, and it made doing rimless a lot easier. When we got busy, I'd do work for the Poulton shop as well, and we offered a good turnaround, despite the volume of work doubling as we took on outside jobs. I brought in help as the workload increased. At that time, one of my old colleagues from Stott Opticians started to train as a DO, and she said, 'Why don't you do it?' I'd been a technician a long time, so I started the ABDO College course.

Every Thursday night I ran a pop quiz in Cheadle Hulme which funded my college fees! By the third year I realised I needed more DO work, rather than still running the workshop, so I moved to Specsavers who paid my course fees and took the pressure off. Being a DJ I was used to being a people person, so I brought those skills to dealing with the public. It was strange letting go of the workshop though, but my head was

in the books and I didn't have much time to think about it. It was different moving to a multiple: special offers and promotions took a while to get my head round. The fun part for me was learning about pre-screening, the fundus camera, taking pressures, I really enjoyed all of that. My experience in the lab – and running discos – meant that I learnt how to use the equipment without too many problems. We spotted a papillodema when I was there which went in my case studies. One of the most surprising things for me was my supervisor, one of the directors, was impressed with my coursework and suggested I go on to be an optometrist. I was 36, though, and had a young family, so felt it would be one step too far. I thanked him, and decided to concentrate on achieving as a DO and a dad!"

After Mark completed his training he needed to look round for a new position. He says, "My former boss from Preston asked me to come back to manage the practice. It was on my doorstep – it was a no brainer. Managing the practice was different to managing the lab. It was an eye opener to learn more about the management and financial side of the business. I'd start my day sweeping outside the shop, saying hello to passers-by. Unfortunately my boss wasn't well, neither was my wife, which led to a lot of uncertainty. When Wyre View Opticians offered me a job simply as a DO, I decided maybe it was time to take a more low-key role. I'm still friends with the business owner who gave me a reference for the ABDO College job." Thinking about his time as a DO, Mark

says, "It was different working for Wyre View – they didn't have a lab but ordered everything online. I helped with marketing, both online and in local media. I also took on frame buying, visiting housebound patients and visiting primary local schools to talk about eyecare, which, despite my experience as a DJ, still made me nervous beforehand. Eventually, though, after four years I was looking for something different, perhaps somewhere where there weren't strict sales targets."

It was Mark's time as a student at ABDO College that really inspired him to apply for the job as a technician there. He says, "Jo Underwood was one of my favourite lecturers and I thought that working for her would be great. I sent her an email and application form, I wasn't sure if I was right for the job but I was invited for an interview last summer. I came down on a Monday, and had to be back that evening for a meeting at Blackpool football club because I scout for them. Football is one of my passions, and I've supported Blackpool since I was a boy. Moving south east to ABDO College would take me a long way from the north west, but when I was offered the job I didn't hesitate. I'd like to think I am following in the same footsteps of the great Tom Baker and Sir Paul McCartney as I am a Doctor Who and Beatles fan."

Mark has been in position since Summer 2015, and so far the job is going well. He says, "As long as I have my timetable under control, it's great, here, with just the right level of pressure. As technician, I enjoy seeing the students,

all working away. It brings back memories. It's good to see the lecturers happy when everything is set up correctly, and I feel like I'm giving back. They work hard behind the scenes, I've seen them preparing, marking, giving one-to-one tuition and writing student reports long into the evening. We've just got a new smart board for the anatomy lab on the first floor, so it's pleasing to see that installed and we are also looking get one downstairs. The only difficult thing has been relocating. I go home to my family every fortnight, so I miss them. I think I have shares in Warwick service station at the moment, and it gives me empathy with the students who've journeyed to come here. My boy worked out the other day had I travelled in one direction I would be on the other side of Russia. The house prices are dearer down here, but I'm hoping the family will soon be relocating to Kent, the boys can start school, Luke can get into a grammar school, and they have more opportunities here, especially growing up in the grounds of Godmersham. My older son is interested in football, I have my coaching badges and I hope to get involved with a local football team."

Mark is getting to know more about his role and the possibilities of working at ABDO College. He says, "I've been assisting in the dissection classes. Today we're doing the mock exams, and I'm assisting with that, and I look forward to getting more involved in the College in years to come. It is great that there are so many avenues open to me at the College."

Emma Pynn has been with ABDO College for a number of years, and has worked her way up from receptionist to technician, acquiring her SMC(Tech) qualification on the way, along with becoming a mum for the first time. Emma says, "I originally came to work at ABDO College as a receptionist. I had been working with horses prior to that, but I realised that there were limited options in that field for my long term future. I enjoyed working at the College, and, even though I'd been there less

College was very understanding, and I had the chance to sit in on relevant parts of the courses that were being taught to other students too. That all helped me get up to speed fast. It was a very busy period, though: I was working two days a week at Specsavers, four days at the College, competing on my horse on my day off and studying every evening!"

After her first year of studies, Emma says, "I was offered full time work at the College as a technician. That enabled me to give up working at Specsavers,

together with Mark, I look after all the equipment. We make everything for students' classes and mock exams: we have our own lab and we do some glazing much of which is for exams and practice sets. It's really nice working at the College lab compared to working in a commercial setting. The most stressful times are when we have lots of students, mock exams and dissections to set up, but even then it's nice stress." Emma continues, "I love the College, the staff are all really lovely. Management are really supportive, particularly with regard to further study and doing qualifications. We've recently bought a house close to the College which is a bit of a project, so I spend much of my time working on the house, looking after my toddler and going for country walks with our Dalmatian. I still ride occasionally, and the house has a little paddock so a horse is in the plans for the future. Even with all that, I'd love to do the DO course, perhaps when my little one is older."

'It's really nice working at the College lab compared to working in a commercial setting. The most stressful times are when we have lots of students, mock exams and dissections to set up, but even then it's nice stress. I love the College, the staff are all really lovely. Management are really supportive, particularly with regard to further study and doing qualifications.'

than a year, I was really happy when my boss Sue Rose approached me and invited me to do the SMC(Tech) course. Everything moved fast: I had started work the previous October, and by September I was enrolled on the course. Because I'd never worked in an optical practice I found a job in a local optical practice, Specsavers in Canterbury, to get some lab experience. The commercial environment of a busy lab was entirely new to me, but back at the College Sue gave me a lot of time and support and showed me the ropes. Everyone at the

which made life a little easier. I had finished most of my studies and was facing the exams when I found out I was pregnant. I made it to the end of the course and passed all bar two exams, which I resat after I'd had my baby. It was a huge relief to complete everything. I took nine months maternity leave and I'm now back part time as Junior Technician."

When you study at ABDO College, you may come across Emma setting up classrooms and labs ready for the students. Emma says, "As a technician,

Emma Pynn



A chance to develop your skills as a DO with the SMC Tech Fast Track

If you have the FBDO qualification, have you thought of joining colleagues to study for your SMC Tech? You can complete the Fast Track Technician Training for FBDOs course in six months, gain CET points while doing it, and develop useful skills to use in practice.

Debbie Gigg, former courses coordinator – optical support programmes, for ABDO College says, “When I took up my former post with the Worshipful Company of Spectacle Makers, (WCSM) I thought it would be a good idea if



technicians go into more detail and at a higher level on some elements of ophthalmic lenses. Obviously there is a focus on glazing, and the course also covers standards in more detail. Now, for qualified DOs, there is no need to repeat a lot of the ophthalmic lens work and some of the practical work.”

The Fast Track Technician Training for FBDOs course covers the elements of glazing and the technician’s role that do not form part of the FBDO qualification. There are 18 written assignments, a practical session and two theory examination papers at the end of the course. Debbie Gigg says, “A lot of people have been interested in the course, and around 30 have completed it. It’s a really good insight into the manufacturing process. You can learn



Anthony Blackman has completed the course, he says, “We were the first cohort of FBDOs in 2012. The course was six months instead of two years, as we had exemption from many of the units. We still had theory and practical exams to take; as well as the glazing project. It’s a distance learning course, but there was a one day hands-on glazing workshop at Birmingham Optical Group for anyone who needed some tuition in how to glaze. The course was interesting and gave a good insight into the role of the technician, particularly some of the demands placed with challenging frames and prescriptions. When dispensing it is important to consider the frame style and how the final spectacles will look. Understanding the surfacing of lenses and the lens production processes has been useful.” Anthony is now a SMC Tech practical examiner, alongside his work with Canterbury Christ Church University, ABDO College and in practice.

‘A lot of people have been interested in the course.’

I took the SMC Tech. Looking at the assessment criteria I spotted that there was quite a lot of overlap with the dispensing programme, and that thought evolved into the SMC Tech Fast Track. We mapped across what was covered in the FBDO syllabus, and highlighted the parts where lab

more about the challenges in manufacturing, and as well as that you gain extra skills. If a job comes back that’s been ordered through remote edging and doesn’t quite fit you can edge it down, and that’s just one example of the many skills that you’ll acquire that can be put into practice.”

Fiona Anderson, who becomes ABDO President in April 2016, has also done the Fast Track Technician Training for FBDOs course. She has advice for anyone who is thinking about joining the course: "I had done a distance learning course before, my BSc(Hons) Business Admin, so I was well acquainted with the stresses of working full time and studying, in addition to working and running a home! I think the key elements are to be organised, time management is crucial. Give yourself enough time to prepare for the weekly assignment and factoring in time to be able to ask any questions of your tutor to help in submission of assignment. Remember that they too will most likely be working full time and are not just sitting waiting for you to email any queries!"

For Fiona, visiting a lab was one of the highlights of the course. She says, "It had been a very long time since I qualified, so lens manufacture had changed, although, basic principles were still the same – a visit to the lab refreshed my memory and got me in the right mind set to actually envisage what finished lenses would look like. Seeing the racks of tools and laps helped me to look more objectively at the calculation questions to make sure the answer I was submitting was feasible! I really enjoyed learning more about lens manufacture and I now have a greater understanding of what goes into the production of a lens. I also find that now when I am buying frames for my practice I now consider how the frame will actually be glazed – rim block screws, rim depth, double rims etc,

I would never have considered this before, or at least not to the same extent." Fiona has been able to put her new skills and confidence into practice since completing the course. She says, "Since becoming SMC(Tech) qualified I have started remote edging and assembling all spectacles in my practice – I don't think I would have had the confidence to do this before the course and now there is very little I wouldn't attempt to do myself. I think overall it has increased my practical skills in setting up spectacles and made me think more carefully about how the finished product will look. I tend to think now about the finished spectacles, especially in terms of induced prism, decentration, centre substance and edge thickness much more and don't tend to look at frames and lenses separately. I think my patients get a better pair of specs now due to my increased knowledge and skills."



Fiona Anderson



Elizabeth Bartlam

DO and lecturer **Elizabeth Bartlam** has completed the SMC Tech Fast Track. She says:

'I found it very useful. It was nice to learn about the glazing side of the item we dispense to our patients, and it provided me with a better understanding of that part of the job.'

The Fast Track Technician Training for FBDOs course is a six month programme. Get in touch with ABDO College by the start of June to join the cohort of students working towards examinations in December 2016.

Debbie Giggs says, "If you are concerned about your ophthalmic lens knowledge there are also revision workshops for the theory papers so you can brush up old knowledge and add in the new. There are also glazing workshops to add to your learning, or you can choose to just do the exams. The workshops give DOs 12 CET points, and we are applying for CET approval for optometrists too."



WCSM Courses

Available through ABDO College

A comprehensive education programme focused on driving up skill levels among the non-regulated workforce within the optical sector

WCSM courses range from Level 2 Optical Support to Level 4 Optical Technicians (and soon to be available a Level 4 Diploma for Optical Assistants). The programme also includes Fast Track Technician Training for FBDOs.

WCSM courses now available from ABDO College:

- Level 2 & Level 3 Optical Support
- Level 2 & Level 3 Diploma in Optical Retail Skills
- Level 2 & Level 3 Diploma in Manufacturing Spectacles
- Level 4 Diploma for Optical Assistants
- Level 4 Diploma for Optical Technicians
- Fast Track Technician Training for FBDOs

Qualifications Accredited in Scotland

- Level 5 & Level 7 Certificate in Optical Care

For further information and application forms, or to request a copy of the WCSM Courses Prospectus, please call the courses team at ABDO College **01227 738 829 (Option 1)** or email info@abdocollege.org.uk

ABDO College Operational Services, Godmersham Park
Godmersham, Canterbury, Kent CT4 7DT
www.abdocollege.org.uk

