



Myopia care: breaking down barriers

Interview with Pascal Blaser and Nick Dash

It is one of the most discussed topics, present at every congress or meeting concerning sight and contact lenses: myopia management. But a thread on how to proceed in all the different countries or overall guidelines, how to communicate with patients/customers and parents are not (yet) an issue.

By Silke Sage

A collaboration of the Swiss optometrist Pascal Blaser and the British optometrist Nick Dash establishes a mechanism to reduce the impact of the “Epidemic of Myopia”.

Currently most Eye Care Professionals routinely follow the continual increase in myopia, year after year, without questioning methods that might slow this progress. Modern science has given ECPs the methods to slow myopic eye progression and they believe it is a duty of care to patients to consider these.

With “Myopia Care” the two professionals want to break down the barriers that restrict the adoption of myopia control strategies. To achieve this they believe a coherent message from patient to professional is necessary: Supporting the process every step of the way with science and education.

This is achieved by delivering a clinical care pathway from child & parent to suitably trained “Myopia Care” specialist. Providing and advising professionals of the scientifically proven techniques that have been shown to deliver effective control.

GlobalCONTACT: What was your motivation to set up “Myopia Care”? Who came up with the idea?

Nick Dash: I was using a protocol in my practice for more than ten years. However I was frustrated because it seemed that few

others were moving forward. We all understand the ‘epidemic of myopia’ across the globe including Europe and the west. Yet no one was doing anything about it. Someone needed to stand up and do something, this was my motivation.

One of the common problems when starting myopia control in practice is a lack of communication. The idea was to use the internet as a source of research and to supply information to patients. To have a predictive index of risk, not specifically of myopia, but the risk associated with eye diseases in the elongation of the eye. So this was the start and then Pascal moved forward and began to develop an algorithm to predict the level of myopia. This algorithm is based on numerous scientific and medical papers around the world, based on the genetics, the parents, the grandparents, the age of onset of the child’s myopia, all these facts have a part to play and we can inform the parents of the potential risk for their child’s vision for the rest of their life.

GlobalCONTACT: How do you see the differences e.g. between Asia and Europe concerning myopia?

Nick Dash: We have an area index as well, so we know their certain genetic profiles that predispose people becoming myopic. Within that calculation we have that in place.



Pascal Blaser (left) and Nick Dash (right)

Pascal Blaser: This is also important for the future: which role plays genetic in becoming myopic? Which points do we have to consider in future?

Nick Dash: You certainly know the study where there is a group of Asian children in Singapore and Asian children in Sidney and the outcome was very different in terms of prevalence myopia. This study indicates that there is a predisposition to some genetic individuals but there are other important facts like e.g. lifestyle, the time spent outdoors that play a big role. These facts are built in our algorithm at the website www.myopia.care.

GlobalCONTACT: Who is the target group?

Nick Dash: The target groups are parents, the children, the clinicians who fit contact lenses. These clinicians also need manufacturers who develop special products for myopia control. So it supports the whole process. Myopia Care is a public free-to-use portal to develop this predictive index. It leads on to a locator, to find an appropriate clinician who has the right education and the willingness to help. It is also to support the manufacturers to deliver that whole process.

GlobalCONTACT: How many optometrists do you have in your database?

Pascal Blaser: More than two hundred in sixteen countries. Hong Kong, New Zealand, Australia, Europe mainly in Germany, Switzerland, England to name some. The website is available in nine languages and there will be more.

GlobalCONTACT: How do you make sure that the optometrists are qualified?

Nick Dash: They have to have certain education in terms of myopia care, and they have to attend high lectures of professional bodies.

GlobalCONTACT: In Germany, for example, it is quite different; we do not have a qualifying system such as you described right now. Here you get your license once and that's it.

Pascal Blaser: I know many of the German optometrists on our website personally. Or they were recommended by other reliable optometrists so that we know this is a good address. In other cases we contact them and ask them what they are doing in terms of myopia control and which education they have. In future we will offer registration process with webinars and before the optometrists start at our website they have to attend such a webinar.

Nick Dash: And they have to validate year by year, so it is an ongoing education. Because there are so many changes in short time in this field, so they have to keep trained regularly.

GlobalCONTACT: My experience is that optometrists know about myopia control, they have the knowledge but they are reluctant to talk to the parents. Because the condition of progressive mopia is something that might happen to a child in the future, but you cannot foresee it in numbers and facts.

Nick Dash: There are some barriers for the doctors to adopt myopia control. They are all busy and often do not have time to raise another subject. The information in this field is large but only few people have an overview of all the possibilities in the case of myopia control. So we want to provide that overview. It needs to be across the board, we do not want to concentrate on one special system. Our website is an appropriate source of information for the patients and for the parents. It is knowledge from a third person and not from an Eye Care Practitioner (ECP) who has his own interests. The patients then go to the specialist and they are already pre-informed. This speeds up the whole process. And it creates an important awareness in parents. The doctor then decides which treatment will be chosen and he provides the right products for the patient. For example: In some prescriptions OrthoK is not appropriate. There is only a small window where we can apply OrthoK.

Pascal Blaser: We have an algorithm to propose appropriate products, but the optometrists can make their own choice.

GlobalCONTACT: In some countries atropine is not an issue because it is not allowed for Optometrists. How do you make sure all the possibilities are on the table?

Pascal Blaser: When an optician is registered he chooses in the product lists the product groups which he wants to display. He says e.g. "I like to show only soft lenses and OrthoK and no atropine". So only these products are displayed. The products at our website are country-based. We contact the manufacturers and ask them to enter their products in our system. It is hard work for us to get the products listed. It takes a lot of time to build a relationship to the manufacturers. That is why Nick attends EFCLIN to get in contact with the producers.

GlobalCONTACT: Do you conduct surveys?

Nick Dash: Our software collects data which will help to refine the treatment protocols. The data is collected in their special patient group so that the software finally can propose a more appropriate strategy. We are trying to standardize the protocols so that the output is helpful. As a resource, manufacturers and clinicians can refine the options that they provide. Of course, private data is absolutely secure at our website.

GlobalCONTACT: Will data get back to you?

Pascal Blaser: At this moment we have a follow-up questionnaire for the practitioners. Every sixth month we control it so that we can see how efficient a certain product is. This can be seen by the follow-ups.

Nick Dash: It will be nice to sit with you here in two or three years and to provide you with all the facts and information we could collect.

GlobalCONTACT: What can the contact lens industry do for you?

Nick Dash: I wish they'd develop even better products and would support us in getting the message out to clinicians and also to the public, using their contacts and their data. Thus raising the awareness of myopia control. All this shall be built on evidence based approach. We would like to get some sponsorship to help to tell that message to all the clinicians out there. We like to bring together all the people who deal with eye care and tell the story. Spreading the knowledge about myopia control by our website can be benefit for all.

Pascal Blaser: The manufacturers can talk to the specialists in their country to get in contact with myopia control, because we do not know the specialist, but the manufacturers do. We are in contact with some universities e.g. in Canada and Italy, and they will use our standardized questionnaire, so that we will get more data. Above that, the Chinese market is very interesting and we like to get some contacts to Chinese manufacturers and eye care specialists.

Nick Dash: We like to have ambassadors in all these countries in order to spread the message of myopia control.

GlobalCONTACT: Who supports you financially?

Nick Dash: Up to now we have financed it all ourselves. But soon we need support to help expand the services offered and raise awareness of myopia management. The anticipation is to keep this free at source to the public. It would be nice to get support from all who have an interest in promoting myopia control. Typically industry and professional bodies. Our goal is for all children 'at risk from myopia' to have an eye care specialist within one hour drive time. At least in Europe to prevent children from becoming more and more myopic, getting stronger and stronger glasses, and have more and more risk of myopic eye diseases.

Pascal Blaser: When we have achieved that then we can go out to promote it to the public. But now we need to get the specialists so that we have the locations for the people searching a specialist when using our website.

Nick Dash: Then we can use social media and the press to heighten the awareness in the public.

GlobalCONTACT: Which countries are most active in myopia control?

Pascal Blaser: In Europe: UK and Germany. Also in other countries everybody is really supporting us, they recommend each other even if they are competitors, but they believe in the idea.

Nick Dash: We are experiencing eye care specialist asking us to get a certain lens to extend the service they can offer. There are new products becoming available in the myopia care arena. We hope to support specialist access the very latest developments that could be included in our armory to perform myopia control. This might be contact lenses, spectacle lenses, pharmacological solutions or simple supporting literature. It is really interesting because here we help them to get new products to help them start and provide a myopia control service.

GlobalCONTACT: Which benefit has an optometrist to get registered at your website?

Nick Dash: First: to get more traffic, more customers. Second: they improve their website information concerning myopia care, and they can deal with their customers more effectively. Last but not least: to tell the story of myopia control. Patients like the idea of having a third party, an independent resource that validates what the opticians or the optometrists or the doctor says.

Pascal Blaser: Another benefit is customer loyalty, because if the parents see that it works with their children they will not leave the optometrists.

GlobalCONTACT: Thank you!