

# Impact of COVID-19: The New Normal for Asia-Pacific Ophthalmology Practices in 2021

**A**lcon hosted an engaging ALCONversation Asia-Pacific on Thursday April 22, 2021 for Key Opinion Leaders in ophthalmology. The hot topic of how the COVID-19 pandemic has evolved ophthalmology practice for surgeons, especially in the Asia-Pacific region, provided vital insight to the future of cataract and refractive surgery practices. In the last year, practitioners have had to navigate the COVID-19 crisis by changing the way their institutions and clinics are run, implementing new safety protocols, and interacting with patients in a safe manner. Though navigating the hardships of a pandemic may present countless obstacles, the physicians gathered at ALCONversation concluded that managing healthcare amidst COVID-19 has brought about positive changes to ophthalmology care.

At the beginning of the meeting, the group, led by Dr Ronald Yeoh, Singapore, reviewed survey results from 14 key opinion leaders on current practice trends for ophthalmologists. At this point in time, most surgeons have resumed all elective surgeries with almost half of the surgeons surveyed conducting surgeries at full capacity. Some countries like India are experiencing a huge second wave, and Singapore is not allowing visitors for medical tourism; so surgeons are still experiencing less than normal numbers of surgeries.

Surgeons also reported more than 50% of current



Pre-meeting survey from 14 participants for ALCONversation Asia-Pacific 22 April 2021

consultations are conducted face-to-face. When there are in-person interactions and surgeries being conducted, a majority of surgeons require ophthalmology staff to wear additional PPE, practice distancing in the OR, and conduct temperature logs.

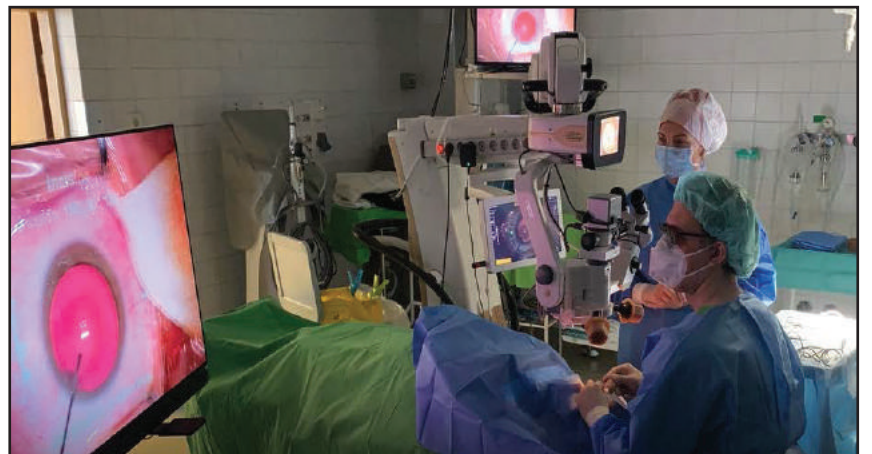
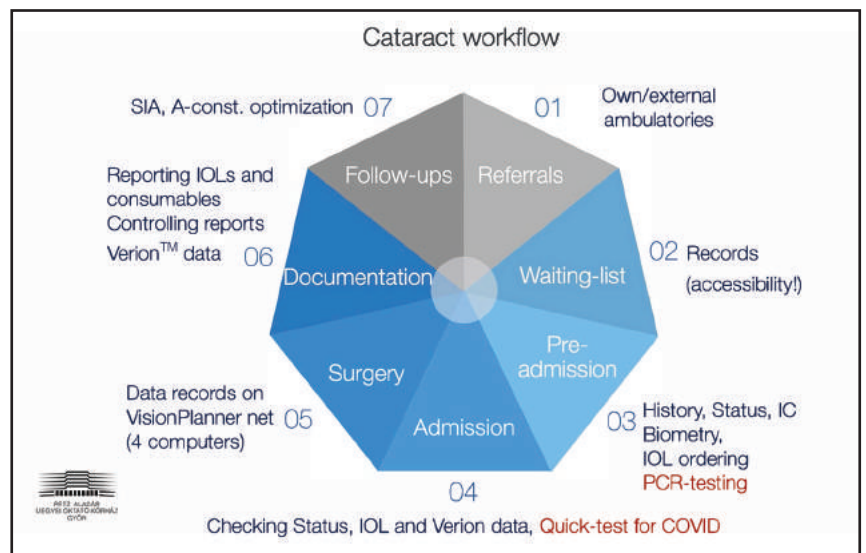
Interestingly, many surgeons have looked into ways to change practice and drive efficiency in the clinic and OR:

- **streamline pre-operative and post-op-operative assessment.**
- **explore new technologies in practice such as tele-medicine and 3D heads up surgery.**
- **constantly thinking of protective measures for both staff and patients as well as technologies to help drive efficiency in practice and procedures.**

Dr. Norbert Pesztenlehrer, an international guest from Hungary, presented his perspectives on the new normal in surgical planning for cataract surgery.

In his current cataract workflow, he explained the convenience of having the latest advanced biometer, ARGOS<sup>®</sup>, during preadmission in the hospital "grey

zone," connected through an internal network to VERION<sup>™</sup> in the OR within the hospital "permissible zone."



Above: Dr. Norbert Pesztenlehrer Patient Cataract Flow Chart and operating suite using the 3D visualisation with NGENUITY<sup>®</sup>.

Aside from that, Dr. Pesz-tenlehrer has adopted 3D visualisation with NGENUITY® for cataract surgeries as the new normal in teaching hospitals. Within this discussion, surgeons shared the benefit of NGENUITY® in terms of quality of image, depth perception, ease of use, and, more importantly from a teaching perspective, how residents, fellows, and trainees can have the full experience of conducting surgery whilst maintaining distance in the OR.

### What is the best way to ensure quality when surgeons work towards maintaining patient throughput in the new normal?

- Paying attention to biometry and final refraction results is key.
- In large volume practice, standardizing equipment, adopting new technologies to create a system-dependent process, and equipping surgeons or trainees through Alcon's phaco development program are helpful and important.
- At smaller private or boutique practices, creating a very personalized and engaging patient experience can result in not only good clinical outcomes but happy patients.

### What about single-use device?

Single-use devices in the OR have become more commonplace during the pandemic as infection risk and transmission is a big concern.

- It allows for minimization of contact
- Cleansing chemicals for surgical tools may actually not be environmentally friendly.
- Potential errors in the workflow of sterilization may

present another challenge to reducing transmission and infection rates.

Though sustainability is a key consideration for many hospitals and surgeons, single-use is crucial during COVID-19 and there are opportunities for creative solutions such as recollecting single-use tools, recycling these disposables, and in turn reducing the cost of these devices.

### How do we optimize efficiency and the surgeon-patient experience from clinic to OR in the new normal?

Dr. Mun Wai Lee from Malaysia emphasised the importance of:

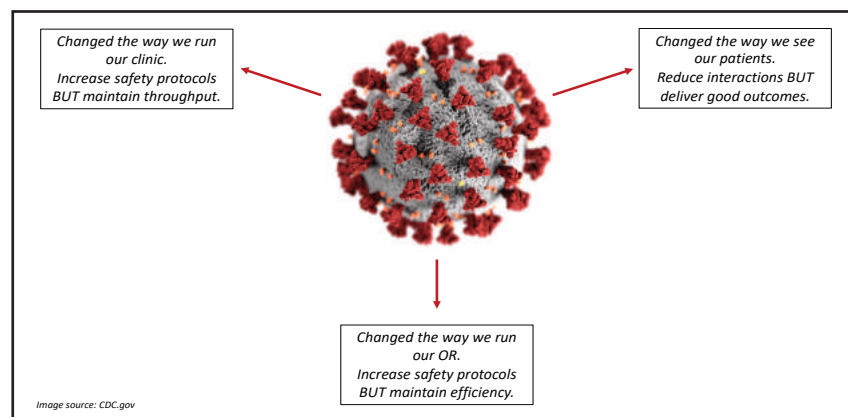
- Patient consultation: efficiently gathering the patient's history, conducting a precise examination, and providing concise counseling for the patient.
- Minimizing time in the OR: no toric markings are required (VERION™ is used), complications are rare (CENTURION® Vision System with ACTIVE SENTRY® is used), and the AutonoMe™ comes preloaded with the Clareon® IOL to reduce surgical time.

Dr. Andrew Chang from Australia provided his thoughts on navigating the COVID-19 crisis, stating that a multidisciplinary approach to managing glaucoma

played a significant role during the pandemic. With 1,225 glaucoma patients booked for face-to-face consultations, Dr. Chang suggested that **modification of processes and care models to facilitate earlier patient intervention is key.** The benefits are accelerated accessibility to services for patients with acute and/or progressive disease and earlier identification of progressive ocular disease.

Dr. Boris Malyugin from Russia was ALCONversation's second international guest, speaking on a great example of **international collaboration and networking on virtual platform**, the EuroCovCat experience. The European COVID-19 Cataract Group (**#EUROCOV-CAT**) is a group of ophthalmic surgeons and experts, currently from 12 countries sharing different experiences and perspectives on the current pandemic situation. In previous publications, EuroCovCat provided recommendations for practice during the pandemic including reducing human contact to a minimum, providing specific spaces for COVID-19 positive patients, new waiting room configurations and methods, regular disinfection of the facility, mask distribution, air system evaluation, and clear communication of all procedures and protocols.

\*ARGOS® only registered in select Asia-Pacific countries.



**Clinics can be run safely during the new normal of COVID-19 without compromising efficiency and good clinical outcomes.**

### ALCONversation wrapped up with insights from the KOLs on the good outcomes that have come out of the COVID-19 crisis.

- Practitioners reappraise the way they manage patients and make changes earlier than they would have otherwise.
- Advances in technologies have provided practitioners with virtual clinics, AI, and even the ability to control slit lamps remotely.
- Opportunity to introduce new technologies into practice as well as ask for support from various government entities.
- New normal of safety measures and risk mitigation strategies that healthcare practitioners around the world have created can now be a standard for our future.

Finally, KOLs have felt an increasing sense of respect and gratitude for their profession while realizing that the profession of ophthalmology is irreplaceable. This realization is most evident when seeing the impact of surgeries being stopped.

**// Only when you've lost it, you realize what you're giving back to society, //**

Dr. Ronald Yeoh.

**Alcon**  
SEE BRILLIANTLY



# Helping people see the future of ophthalmology learning brilliantly

The Alcon Experience Academy (AEA) was launched in 2018 as a way to provide ophthalmology training and educational resources to eyecare professionals who wish to advance their learning. As a continuous professional online learning platform with a variety of tools, videos, and modules, AEA aims to globally educate while providing high-quality and easily accessible content from leaders in the field. AEA serves as a one-stop non-branded global portal for healthcare professionals to collaborate and participate in discussions and training opportunities.

With the difficulties of 2020, AEA has faced several opportunities within the realm of virtual and online content. Thus, the Steering Panel for Alcon Training and Education (SPATE) has been a key force for developing and improving quality content while identifying unmet educational needs for ophthalmology professionals around the world. The SPATE panel aligns on educational activities within AEA by reviewing existing global content for regional relevance, driving relevant educational content development, and recommending optimal dissemination formats as well as participating as faculty members within educational settings, includ-

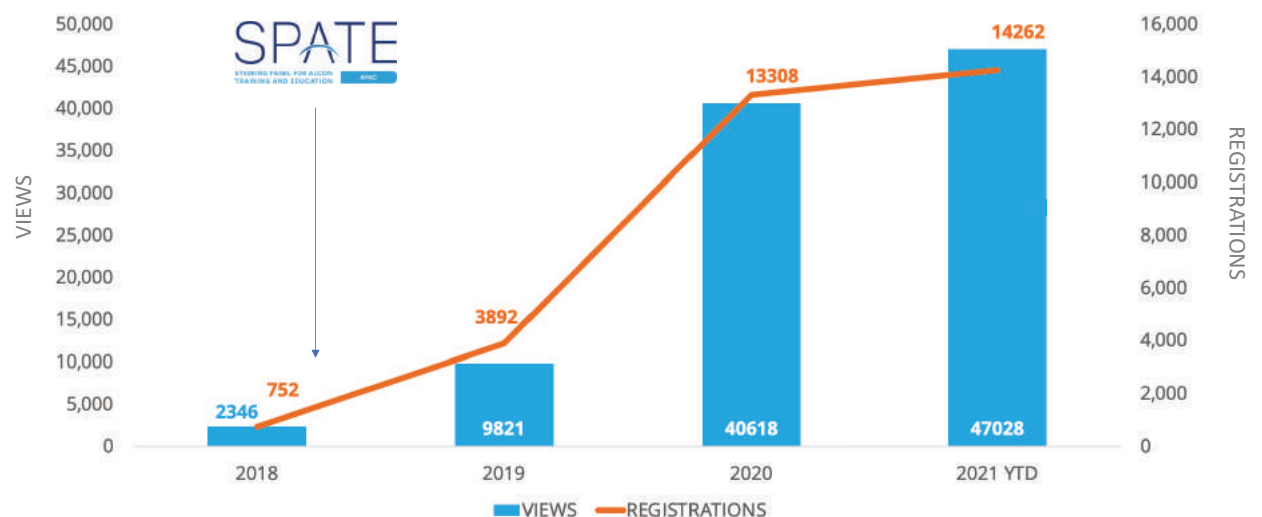
ing the AEA Digital Discussion Series. AEA currently offers a variety of learning tools such as its Digital Learning Series (short videos and animations), Digital Discussion Series (60-minute live broadcasts, short presentations, and Q&A sessions), and Podcast Series (engaging discussions with topic experts).

In 2019 and 2020, SPATE, through its sub-committees, initiated the creation of 81 educational modules for AEA and promoted these modules as part of the Digital Learning Series through social media. Additionally, with 37 original videos presented in English, SPATE increased reach by translating these videos to seven other languages including Spanish, Chinese, Korean,

Japanese, and Russian. With the Digital Discussion Series, SPATE created a series of live broadcasts through the AEA website around topics addressing unmet educational needs in respective regions. Twelve live broadcasts were made available for the Asia-Pacific (APAC) region. These broadcasts, which have become available globally, are delivered in an engaging manner involving members of SPATE. In the past, these live discussion sessions have been held in Singapore, Taipei, Surat, and Seoul with topics including "Multifocal IOLs - Patient Journey" and "Pathways to Patient Satisfaction with Topography-Guided LASIK." In 2020, the discussion sessions were still broadcast globally but were fully virtual in nature. Topics included

"Improving Success with Toric IOLs" and "Ocular Surface - Getting Ready for Cataract Surgery." These are now available on demand on the site. Finally, the AEA has partnered with Dr. Ben LaHood to create The Second Look Podcast series which are easily accessible on platforms such as Apple Podcasts, Spotify, iHeartRadio, and Stitcher. As virtual meetings and conferences have taken the front seat in terms of educational offerings the past year, webinar fatigue has become a concern and alternative ways of disseminating developed content are necessary. The Second Look has produced 10 episodes to date and engages with highly regarded ophthalmologists from around the world by discussing hot topics within

## Asia Pacific - Alcon Experience Academy Growth



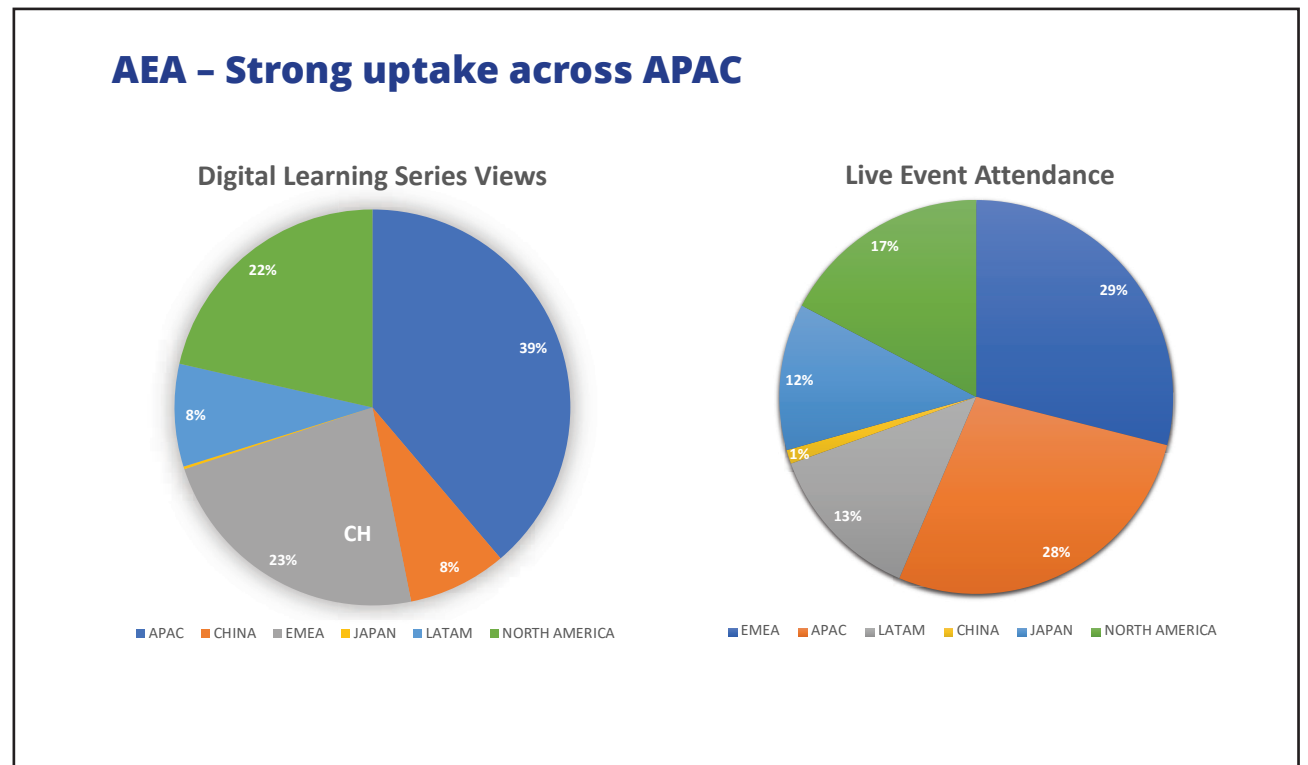
\*AEA registrations and views in APAC including Japan and China



ophthalmology while also exploring the lives of the interviewees. With more than 2,000 downloads across 36 countries and 5 continents globally, the podcast series is an incredibly simple way for healthcare professionals to conveniently listen and access quality content, even on-the-go.

Although the pandemic has posed many challenges in 2020 and 2021, AEA saw a noticeable increase in both platform views and site registrations in the past two years. As online modules were made available in 2019, AEA saw a continued growth to date from 3,892 registrations in 2019 to 14,262 registrations in 2021. Interestingly, the APAC region contributed to 39% of Digital Learning Series views while the North America region contributed to 41% of overall content views.

SPATE has also made efforts to improve user experience on the AEA platform over time. With both positive feedback and constructive feedback, users have found the videos to be high-quality covering a broad range of topics and overall navigation to be easy. In 2020, 78% of SPATE members surveyed reported attendance at an Alcon Online Event, indicating that either short webcasts or 60-min-



ute interactive sessions with multiple speakers would be most useful to them as an eyecare professional. Additionally, users indicated that they enjoy the presentation format of videos and the ability to submit questions to be answered through the online program. Presentation topic and the main speaker are also key factors in drawing users to the online programs.

Though SPATE has already contributed a great deal to the growth of the AEA platform, SPATE intends to keep driving awareness and activity to the site along with maintaining fresh and relevant content. SPATE is also committed to bettering

educational tools on AEA and believes that the most productive content is driven by prominent leaders in the ophthalmology field, Key Opinion Leaders, peers, and professionals from teaching hospitals or fellowship programs.

There are a number of ways to become engaged and active on the AEA platform. Eyecare professionals from anywhere in the world, including optometrists, nurses, technicians, and students) are encouraged to

visit the online site and start learning from the various resources available. As live events through the digital discussion series become available, all are encouraged to attend and contribute to the Q&A sessions and panel discussions. AEA is invested in promoting lifelong learning and the power of education in the field of ophthalmology and hopes its users find true value through the virtual learning resources that are available to eyecare professionals around the world.

**Scan the AEA code to register for the Alcon Experience Academy, a wealth of educational tools and ophthalmology resources.**

