

IN the Spotlight: The International year of Light

Editorial

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In December of 2013, the 68th session of the General Assembly of the United Nations declared 2015 to the International Year of Light and Light Based Technologies (IYL). This was the outcome of several years of effort and dedicated work by a number of optics related professional societies. The UN resolution stated “applications of light science and technology are vital for existing and future advances in medicine, energy, information and communications, astronomy, architecture, entertainment and culture”. IYL was inaugurated on January 19-20, 2015 at a grand opening ceremony at the Paris headquarters of UNESCO (United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organization) with Nobelists, prominent scientists, policy makers, politicians, etc. and webcast live on UN-TV.

As we eye care professionals and vision scientists know, light is

more than just science and technology. It directly affects the daily life of people. The IYL provides us an opportunity to do public outreach, inspire the next generation of scientists and clinicians, and to educate and influence policy makers on the importance of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education in general and Optical sciences in particular. This will allow us to underscore the fact that optics is the key enabling technology to solve many of the problems facing humanity. Optics is the bread and butter of the eye care community and this community uses not only simple optics such as lenses and mirrors, but also sophisticated optics such as lasers, and OCT devices. Other critical applications of optics include areas such as photodynamic therapy and optogenetics which offer great promise in the future.

Let us also not forget President Obama’s BRAIN initiative which will utilize huge amounts of optics technology and science in areas such as imaging. It is also appropriate that the 2014 Nobel prizes were awarded in both physics and chemistry to optics based technologies – for the blue LEDs and for novel biological microscopy techniques! Optics as an influential National Academy of Sciences USA report put it is an enabling science.

The year 2015 commemorates a number of historical milestones in optical sciences, including Ibn al Hyatham’s publication on Optics, in the 10th century. IYL, an international celebration, is aimed at stimulating worldwide interest and highlight the importance of optics on society and on our future. Further information can be found at the IYL website: www.light2015.org.

I strongly urge the vision and eye care community to get involved in this celebration of optics, the basis of the Ophthalmic profession. This can be done at various levels of outreach, and showcasing what the science of light has done for the benefit of medical care.