Outlook on Industry

Bausch & Lomb buys eyeonics and plans re-launch of crystalens IOL in Europe

Revised design, better support for surgeons, will help accommodating lens succeed

In a move intended to establish itself as a leader in the lucrative presbyopia-correcting intraocular lens market, Bausch & Lomb (B&L) acquired eyeonics in February, maker of crystalens, the first and only accommodating intraocular lens approved by the US Food and Drug Administration. Prior to the acquisition, the venerable firm had no intraocular lens in this field.

Now B&L is aggressively marketing the latest version of crystalens, the 5mm optic Five-O model in the US, where more than 100,000 of the crystalensles have been implanted.

B&L also plans to re-launch crystalens in Europe, where the earlier AT-45 model was met with great skepticism. Roll-out of the Five-O model is scheduled for the XXVI Congress of the ESCRs this September in Berlin.

Mr Ostrov replaced Ronald L Zarella in January, who returned to B&L in 2001 after a career at General Motors. (Mr Zarella previously worked as president of the International Division in B&L.) Mr Ostrov's background in consumer and contact lens products at Procter & Gamble, Johnson & Johnson and CIBA led some analysts to speculate that investment bank Warburg Pincus was signaling a move toward emphasizing those product lines in choosing him. Not so, Mr Ostrov said.

Indeed, the global premium IOL market is growing more than 20 per cent annually, and B&L wants its share. Acquiring eyeonics immediately gives B&L about 30 per cent of the US market, and strong growth. Eyeonics' revenues topped €22m in 2007, double the 2006 figure.

In acquiring eyeonics, B&L also brought on J Andy Corley, president and co-founder of eyeonics, and one of the most talented and innovative executives in the industry. Mr Ostrov credits Mr Corley with helping convince the US Medicare program to allow patients to pay extra for premium IOls, a development he believes broke the regulatory chokehold on IOL development. It also paved the way for emergence of a worldwide market for presbyopia-correcting and other premium IOls. As a co-founder of Chiron Ophthalmics, Mr Corley also participated in the introduction of LASIK. He has held executive positions at Allergan and what is now Advanced Medical Optics and is corporate vice-president and global president of surgical products at B&L.

Mr Corley acknowledged issues with the early crystalens and the support it received in Europe. "The first European roll-out was very quick. This time it is well thought out and controlled so we can make sure surgeons are hitting their refractive targets," Several European surgeons are currently implanting the device in preparation for the roll-out. Having the global sales and support resources of B&L behind the project will be a big advantage, he added.

Mr Corley noted that when the lens was first introduced in Europe, only one salesperson served the entire continent. Also, doctors were not always ready to do the precise biometry and keratometry needed to get a lens close enough to the refractive target to satisfy patients paying for a premium lens. Many lacked access to the IOL Master and could not get a precise enough A-scan. So the lens developed a reputation for unpredictability.

Its prospects were further harmed by research that suggested it did not move enough in the eye to produce the level of accommodation it was supposed to deliver, or even moved in the wrong direction. Some critics claimed it didn't work any better than a non-accommodating IOL.

Mr Corley disputes that the early lens suffered from such defects. Plus, he says the current Five-O version delivers better accommodation performance and is more stable. "We're seeing good outcomes, and more and more doctors and patients are going to crystalens. 100,000 patients can't be wrong."

Adding near vision

Ralph Chu, MD, of the Chu Vision Institute, Edina, MN, US, said he had concerns about the predictability of the earlier AT-45 crystal lens. However, with the Five-O, with its parallel plates and greater area of contact between the haptics and the capsular bag, and its 5mm optical zone, stability has not been a problem. In fact, Dr Chu, who was an investigator for the phase III clinical trial of the next generation of crystals, known as HD-100, now uses the crystals in almost all of the 40 per cent of patients who choose a premium lens in his practice.

"It's a quality of vision issue," Dr Chu said. "Most patients would rather have better quality at distance and mid-range and use spectacles for reading than have the reduced contrast you get with multifocals."

He does still implant a few multifocal lenses in patients with special need for close vision. Results from the phase III trial of the HD-100 suggest it may provide adequate accommodation for reading without spectacles in many patients, said John Hovanesian, MD, University of California, Los Angeles, USA: among 125 eyes tested, about 60 achieved results within 0.5 dioptres of the target. Among these, 86 per cent had 20/20 or better at distance, 80 per cent 20/20 at intermediate distance, and 82 per cent read J2 or better up close. This is better close vision than the original AT-45 without loss of contrast sensitivity, Dr Hovanesian said.

These results show that the HD-100 crystals does accommodate, generally by about 1.5 to 2.0 dioptres, Dr Hovanesian said. But the precise mechanism that allows the lens to focus up close without multifocality is unclear.

Mr Ostrov is optimistic about the HD but would not elaborate. "It's proprietary," he said.

Dr Hovanesian speculates that a combination of the lens deforming plus a different optic allow the HD to accommodate beyond the apparent movement of the lens.

Mr Corley believes that the Five-O lens and the HD, when it becomes available, will both do well in Europe not only because they can deliver superior quality of vision, but because more surgeons are now familiar with multifocal lenses and the precise measurements and surgical techniques needed to get a good refractive outcome. The same techniques apply to the crystals, he said.

With results like this and the backing of a major global organization, Mr Corley believes the crystals will become a dominant player in Europe. "The eyeonics people coming over are extremely happy to be associated with the high-quality, long-standing brand of Bausch & Lomb. The integration has gone extremely well and the European launch is proceeding smoothly. We are very excited about the future."