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Dear

Worldwide about 140 million people are wearing contact lenses as an alternative to spectacles. Statistics for Europe in 2020 show that for most countries about 5 to 10% of their population are happily wearing contact lenses.

The first contact lenses were hard contact lenses made of plexiglas in the '60s and '70s. Because of their outstanding comfort soft lenses have replaced the rigid ones almost completely – with some notable exceptions. Technology, however, allowed us to transition from the old non-breathable hard lenses to modern day rigid lenses made of highly gas permeable materials. For an important minority of lens wearers it is worth sacrificing (a little bit of) comfort for improved visual quality. In contrast to soft lenses, rigid lenses do not mold to the shape of the cornea and in this way they provide better visual acuity in persons with an abnormal corneal shape. In about 10% of lens wearers – an estimated 3.2 million people in the EU - rigid lenses are preferred mainly because of this so called astigmatism that cannot be as effectively corrected with soft lenses. Some irregularities of the corneal surface cannot be compensated at all with glasses nor with soft lenses; for these patients rigid gas permeable lenses are the only solution to improve visual acuity and avoid that these persons become visually impaired.

We understand that European authorities want to limit the use of PFAS chemicals in order to protect its citizens' health. For contact lenses, however, PFAS is an essential component in order to produce the gas permeable materials that are used for the production of rigid lenses. If the use of PFAS would be prohibited for lens production, then millions of patients in Europe would suffer. Although it is not a rare disease, most people do not know about keratoconus. It is a disease that develops in young people leading to severely impaired vision. In my part of Europe, the Benelux, we can estimate that about 75 000 persons suffer from keratoconus. We do not have an effective surgical treatment for this disease but correction with rigid gas permeable contact lenses is extremely successful in correcting vision and allowing these young people to lead normal everyday lives.

Kind regards

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In attachment: for further reading "The unique features and benefits of RGP contact lenses"