

## **ORBITAL NECESSITIES**

By Shara Lawrence-Weiss

If you look around at the people close to you, can you find anything different about them? Is each person wearing the same clothing? Does each person have the same hair? Probably not, right? Well, in the same way that God made different clothes and hairstyles, He also made different bodies and physical traits for each person.

Do you know what a conformer is? Would you be able to tell if someone was wearing one? For someone who has to wear a conformer, this very small object is one of the most important things that they put on each day. Putting a conformer on may be even more important than putting on their socks, their shoes, or their coat.

A conformer is made from a non-toxic, acrylic plastic, and looks like a very thick, deep contact lens. There is no vision correction in a conformer. A conformer can also be called a prosthetic eye, or a lens. Sometimes people have one eye that is much smaller than the other. This eye is known as a microthalmic eye. Microthalmic is another word for small. When someone has a small eye, it can be because that eye did not develop completely while they were growing in the womb. It could also be due to an accident or injury early in their childhood that stopped or delayed the growth and development of that eye.

There are some negative side effects that can occur because of a small eye. If an eye has stopped developing, then the bones that sit around that eye (the orbital bones) will also have delayed growth. If a person's brain is not sending signals saying that there is still growth going on around the small eye, then there will be an obvious difference in size on that side of the person's face. That eye, and the area surrounding the eye, will appear much smaller. One way to correct this problem is to

have the person wear a conformer. A prosthetics specialist pours a mold of the small eye, much like a clay mold is poured, and then a personalized conformer is made from this mold. The conformer is then the perfect shape and size for that person and is now ready to be worn over the microthalmic eye. The conformer is placed over the eye just like a contact lens. The depth and circumference of the conformer push the lower eyelid down and the upper eyelid up. This makes the eye appear larger. Wearing a conformer also sends a signal to the brain telling it that there is still growth and development needed around that eye. This ensures that the orbital bones surrounding the small eye will continue to grow, so that the entire face has an equally proportioned look.

A conformer can be left clear if the person has any vision or light perception in the small eye. If the eye does not have any vision or light perception, due to other varying complications during development, then the conformer can be painted. A prosthetics specialist carefully paints the conformer to match the color and design of the normal, healthy, seeing eye. This gives the appearance of two matching eyes. If a person begins wearing a conformer from birth or early childhood, it is very important that they have regular checkups with the prosthetics specialist. This ensures that the conformer can be made bigger, wider, or deeper, growing along with the developing child. As the orbital bones around the small eye continue to grow, it is important to enlarge the conformer to accommodate this growth. Once the child has passed through his or her growth spurts, there will still be periodic visits to the prosthetics specialist to polish the conformer, and to track the progress of the eye, and the surrounding orbital area. The eye wearing the conformer will not have the same motion and range of mobility as the healthy eye, but they will generally track together quite well.

A conformer is typically worn over a microthalmic eye every day, and should be left in even at night. Socks, shoes, and coats are an important part of a daily routine. For someone who wears a

conformer, this orbital necessity is probably one of the most important aspects of *their* daily routine. Do you know what a conformer is? Would you be able to tell if someone was wearing one? God made each person unique and special in his or her own way. How great it is to know that there is no one else just like you, and that God loves each of us with all of our differences and unique qualities!