



National Academy of Opticianry

## **Continuing Education Course**

Approved by the National Contact Lens Examiners

## **Capitalizing on the Contact Lens Dispensary**

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# Capitalizing on the CONTACT LENS DISPENSARY

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A contact lens dispensary can be profitable as well as a fun part of the eye care practice. This paper provides a perspective to evaluate the tools available to create a contact lens practice that is pleasurable as well as profitable

If there is an established contact lens dispensary in your practice, or you are looking to expand or grow the contact lens practice, this paper may help identify areas of concern as well as provide insight and ideas to help achieve those goals.

The information provided is based on information collected from thousands of practices. One glaring observation noted was the overall condition and furnishings of the waiting area. Another observation was practitioners and staff so engaged in providing care for patients they rarely took time to observe the waiting room and listen to what patients are “really” saying.

Many years ago, a colleague conducted a survey on practice management. He went into several practices at random as a “mystery patient” to observe activities in the front office. He was amazed to hear staff members misquoting fees, presenting false or inaccurate information on services, even misleading the patients regarding outcomes of services.



## **Waiting Room**

The most likely place to initiate imprinting on the patient’s perspective of the practice is the waiting area. A clean waiting room with pleasing decor, comfortable furniture, and perhaps refreshments can favorably impress patients. I observed a practice recently that had a coffee bar and their own barista, what a nice touch. Have current magazines and publications, there are few things as annoying as picking up a publication that is older than dirt. If your practice caters to multiple age groups provide age-appropriate materials. Strive to create the appearance of a waiting room that is pleasant and inviting; when patients are made to feel comfortable they may not object to an unforeseen longer than usual wait.

In the event the schedule has been impeded by an emergency or unforeseen event, strive to inform patients as *soon as possible* and either re-scheduled or advised of options.

Provide a separate, safe, sound protected play area for children. A parent or adult supervisor must be present at all times. All toys and play items **MUST** be cleaned and disinfected frequently.

Many practices provide preprogrammed digital devices detailing office promotions as well

as educational programs. Some practices utilize their own staff members to describe office services. Patients welcome being able to view how a test or procedure is performed; describing potential outcomes of testing often puts their minds at ease.

A practice displaying staff accomplishments and accolades impresses on the patient the practice is supportive of the staff and proud of their collective expertise. A nice touch could be providing a gallery of photographs of staff (and families) in the waiting areas. Alongside the gallery, display diplomas, certificates and licenses pertaining to staff accomplishments and training including continuing education seminars and conferences that staff members attended. Community service awards might be displayed as well. The patient will be presented with the human element of the practice while building confidence that the practice is going to expertly provide for their eye care needs.

Provide current brochures, pamphlets, and materials outlining information on your products and services. A wealth of information is available (usually free) from contact lens and pharmaceutical vendors. The more educated patients are about services the practice offers, the more direct questions they'll ask. The staff will spend less time explaining options. A nice touch is to place a practice stamp or sticker on reference materials to identify the practice. Business cards with the names of all staff and description of their titles and duties is a nice touch.

## **STAFF**

The staff is an integral part of any successful practice; they are an extension of the eye care professional. Often the patient spends a more time with staff than with the doctor or eye care professional.

Equally as important is the impression of the staff. All staff members should be neat, courteous, and professional.

It has become exceedingly difficult for practices to control the clothing choices of the staff. Many practices have opted for uniforms or "scrubs." Offering to subsidize the cost as well as allowing the staff to pick styles and color schemes are suggested.

The receptionist should greet the patient with a genuine concern for their individual needs. Doing so will help to put the anxious or agitated patient at ease.

## **QUESTIONS/FEEES**

In most practices, it is the staff member(s) that deal with answering questions on contact lenses and products, either on the phone or in person. It is recommended that the staff work from a dedicated "up to date" script. Often when patients inquire they are price shopping. To avoid embarrassment quoting incorrect information on contact lens options and fees, all staff should be instructed to *never quote specific fees*. Have contact lens fee options available in legible form. Allow the patient to review information while waiting. You may want to include a statement indicating "our fees and services are comparable to the industry average, and we offer the most current and healthiest lens options." The patient will appreciate being well informed prior to entering the fitting process. When options are discussed and reviewed there should be no hidden surprises. Be prepared to present a

cost justification, but avoid discussing the final fee until it is determined what type of lens modality will be utilized.

Avoid offering refund options up front. It is not uncommon for the patients to perceive the value of their contact lens experience relative to cost. If they are offered a refund on fitting fees they will be less likely to value the fitting experience and less motivated to make the prescribed system work.

It is unlikely that other health care professionals would refund fees for services if the outcomes were not as expected. Patients need to understand they are paying for time, education and expertise.

Years ago, I recall reading a study that researched the actual chair time value assessed per patient in an eye care practice. It was calculated that for every 15 minutes the patient spent in the exam chair the actual cost to recoup was \$375.00 (regardless if there were any services being performed.)

Expenses such as rent/mortgage, taxes, salaries, health insurance, equipment, practice insurance and overhead must be accounted for regardless if services are rendered.

If the decision is made to refund a portion of the fee, explain to the patient that an exception is being made on their behalf because they are a valued patient.

Another option might be giving the patient a credit to use in the amount of the service that they could apply to other services offered by the practice.

## “Welcome to the Office” Questionnaire



If the patient is specifically inquiring about a contact lens fitting, re-fit or evaluation of their present contact lenses, a questionnaire is invaluable in reducing chair time.

### **The questionnaire might include:**

*If a previous or current contact lens wearer, what type/brand/design?*

*How many hours per day or days per month do/did they wear their lenses?*

*What do/did they like/dislike about their lenses?*

*Specify any “chronic” ocular problems, such as pain, burning, itching, redness or discharge*

*Describe use of any eye drops, (specify how much/how often)*

*Describe any reduction of wear time if previous or present CL wear*

*Type of care systems and solutions (past and present)*

*History of any complications, injuries, infections that might have been a result of previous wear/abuse.*

*Current health problems or medications that could be contraindicated to lens wear (such as allergies/ meds, dry eye, diabetes, ANY eye surgery, treatments or procedures)*

*Participation in hobbies or sports activities*

*Extent of the use of Tech devices/computers, laptops, note-pads, cell-phone*

*Exposure to noxious fumes, vapors or chemicals at work, play, sports, and recreation?*

*(If yes, soft contact lens options should be discouraged.)*

### **PRELIMINARY EVALUATION**

The questionnaire is a great tool to establish patient credibility; coupled with evaluating patient history as well as pre-testing may help to uncover information beneficial in evaluating the present fit or reveal past problems. Patients generally do not like to share “bad” experiences regarding previous lens wear as they are fearful that they may be advised they are not optimal contact lens candidates, or worse, should avoid wearing contact lenses altogether.

When possible, it might help for the patient to provide any solutions or eye drops they are using, along with previous and current spectacles and contact lenses. Often a previous care system, spectacle and/or contact lens modality or questionable Rx can raise a red flag.

It may be helpful to review the information with the patient. Verbalizing what was written on the questionnaire might encourage the patient to recall vital information. This process will take a bit more time, but the wealth of information received will ensure a greater fitting experience.

The questionnaire could help identify the area of vision the patient utilizes most in their daily environment.

For example, if the patient spends several hours a day at a computer, select a lens which won't be as affected by dehydration. Recognize they are most likely working in a closed in visual space instead of infinity. Inquire what working distance their computer screen or monitor is positioned.

Another area to avoid is the patient telling the ECP what lenses “they” want. Decades ago patients asked the eye care professional their opinion as to what was their best contact lens option. The commercialization of contact lenses today has unfortunately redirected that exchange. People now refer to contact lenses as *consumable items rather than prescription devices. As eye care professionals, it is our duty to help re-educate the patient that Contact Lenses are Medical Devices!*

As information is gathered from the patient the fitting process will be simplified. By process of elimination, you are weeding out contact lens modalities that historically have not

worked well for this patient's visual and environmental needs.

Be prepared to provide patients with a wide variety of products and services, utilize lenses that are going to satisfy their individual visual needs as well as the duration of time the lenses are to be worn.

You may have sophisticated instrumentation to evaluate the healthiest options for the patient, however listening will provide information needed to affirm the process.

### ***PATIENT OBSERVATIONS***

Exemplifying cleanliness concerns within the practice is of utmost importance: An excellent example would be to have all staff members involved in patient care wash their hands in front of each patient.

Wiping down instruments with an approved cleaning product prior to testing will aid in protecting patients from possible contamination from previous patients. There are quality disinfectant wipes that are effective over a broad range of organisms. However, it is best to check with the equipment manufacturer as some metals can be degraded by specific chemicals such as alcohol.

### ***INSTRUMENTATION/WORK UP***

Patients need assurance that the practice is equipped to handle their needs; providing sophisticated instrumentation has proven to instill greater patient confidence.

A complete work-up should be performed on every potential contact lens patient regardless if they are a previous wearer or new patient.

The evaluation exam should include but not be limited to a thorough refraction (if significant refractive changes are noted it is wise NOT to attempt to make spectacle adjustments until cornea measurements are stabilized.) Keratometric measurement and/or corneal topography should be utilized if available. Even in a routine fit, having a corneal map allows information to be shared with the patient allowing for recommendations on what lens design or modality is needed to correct corneal irregularity or compromise.

Another area where topography could be advantageous is describing to the patient the need for a specific lens modality or design, especially if the appropriate lens choice happens to be a costlier lens modality.

If refitting the patient from a PMMA, low Dk GP or thicker soft lens material, the use of a topographical map will aid in identifying with the patient progression through several changes in the corneas' shape prior to reaching corneal stability. Explain that this process may require several lens adjustments or changes. The discussion of corneal rehabilitation is much easier to explain to the patient if you can share with them a visual of the process; if necessary, compare distortion changes following the refit. If the patient has been helped in re-equilibration of their corneas, a "picture" can be worth a thousand words



### **CONTACT LENS OPTIONS:**

There is a great concern today for patients being lost to the internet, outside providers or even optical establishments ill-qualified to manage conventional or specialty contact lenses. Patients' generally leave a practice for three reasons:

1. perceived lower price
2. lack of the desired product/services
3. convenience

When possible, offer the patient a wider variety of products or at least, a reliable referral source especially if the practice is not equipped to manage higher end or specialty fits.

If patients are made to feel the practice has their best optical needs and interests at heart, they will tend to be more loyal to other services provided.

With today's sophisticated materials, it is not necessary to keep patients in a modality just because their perception maybe it is the best option for them. When indicated, the opportunity exists to upgrade their current contact lens modality just as the practice would offer to update spectacle needs. An educated patient returns more often for follow up care.

If the practice is not equipped to offer specialty contact lens services, a suggestion might be to focus on specializing in the colored lens arena. Many practices have done well by offering optical fashion shows, incorporating frame and, contact lens reps and even apparel involvement. These fun and profitable events often bring friends and family members exposure to the practice. Interested staff members could be trained to assist in offering colored non-vision correcting lenses to match clothing or support a favorite sports team.

*(Be advised that all staff be aware that contact lenses are "not fashion accessories," they are FDA regulated medical devices and even though these lenses have no corrective power they still are **medical devices** which must be maintained as well as professionally fit to the eye.)*

### **REFIT**

Address the patient presented for a refit with a detailed explanation that the old contact lenses they have in a baggy or drawer at home are probably there for a reason. They were either uncomfortable or they couldn't see through them. There is no justification for re-



using old lenses, strongly advise immediate disposal.

In a situation where the cornea is going through a re-equilibration process or is accustomed to much greater levels of oxygen, placing an extremely low Dk, dirty, or damaged lens on the cornea may exacerbate corneal problems. Performing any kind of evaluation or refraction over soiled or "unknown" lenses is ineffective.

Following thorough evaluation and determining both eyes are healthy and visually stable, order a new pair of duplicate lenses and proceed from there.

### ***SPARE LENSES/ADJUNCT SPECTACLES***

It is recommended to provide Gas Permeable wearers and specialty fits with a spare pair of lenses so they aren't tempted to wear a defective, damaged or soiled lens. This will cut down on those after-hours calls/texts frantically hoping your practice will have a lens they can wear on their date or sporting event.

Recommend that the patient have a pair of upgraded/updated spectacles they are comfortable to wear if they should discontinue contact lens wear for any reason. If the patient doesn't have a back-up pair of spectacles that they like, they might be tempted to wear previous contact lenses in the presence of an active eye infection, injury or corneal compromise.

Another profitable as well as fun part of the fitting process is providing the patient with an attractive quality pair of sunglasses to wear with their contacts. If patients have invested in their contact lenses they will appreciate quality sunglasses. Poor quality sunglasses can degrade and distort the patient's vision. They assume they are seeing poorly through their contacts when their poor-quality sunglasses are most likely the cause of the distortion!

Let the patient view an acuity chart while holding the patient's "cheap" sunglasses in front of the projector. Allow them to visualize how they are "seeing" through their sunglasses, and then allow them to see how the eye chart appears through a quality pair of sunglasses. If the "vision chart" is blurry escort the patient directly to the sunglass display.

Note: when using digital projection, give the patient the opportunity to observe the projected eye chart in the same manner.

### ***CARE SYSTEMS***

The best care system is the one the patients will use as directed! Be diligent about placing the patient on a system that is suited for their lens care needs but also convenient to use. A good rule of thumb is to have the patient bring all solutions as well as eye drops at the time of their visit. Review the current care system use. If they are using an approved system correctly and exhibit no clinical concerns, it would be wise to not to make changes at that time.

If lenses are damaged or soiled, it's most likely related to improper lens wear or care. Explain to the patient dirty lenses do not perform optimally and can cause serious infection and/or irritation. Note on the history if any previous experience with an infection. It is likely the irritation or infection is likely related to the lack of proper lens care and instruction. Re-

introducing the patient to proper lens care and use of products will help to ensure that does not re-occur.

Make a definitive statement by taking previous miss-matched solutions and dispose of all products along with outdated or questionable lenses. Present the patient with a new system in a nice bag or container (imprinting with your practice name and phone number is a nice touch) be sure to include complete care instructions to avoid ANY misunderstanding.

Review the care system as many times as necessary until the patient is compliant, then have the patient read the instructions back. The likelihood of the patient making a mistake will be lessened. If the patient has compliance issues you may want to share photographs of irritated or diseased eyes. Solutions and contact lens manufacturers are generally more than willing to assist the practice in providing tools to encourage proper lens care.



*Discuss the use of cosmetic and personal care products (especially eye care products.)* Certain cosmetics can cause allergic reactions as well as sensitivities, contamination and/or coating of certain lens materials. Hand-soap (containing perfumes, oils or lanolin,) hair spray, hair gels, (most contain alcohol) as well as hand and face creams/gels/lotions can impact the wettability of contact lens materials. It is advised the patient choose products that are oil and fragrance-free as well as eye care products and cosmetics that are formulated and tested for contact lens wearers.

Avoid exposing any products to heat, never use water or saliva to moisten dried out products, or use eye care products or cosmetics in the presence of an active eye-infection. All liquid based eye makeup products should be replaced every 2 months (use the tooth brush replacement philosophy.)

### ***DELIVERY AREA***

Must be clean, neat and tidy. No food, cups, drinks, or open cosmetic products (OSHA regulation violations can be subject to extreme fines.) The sink area must be impeccably clean. Provide lint free paper towels, large magnifying mirrors, disposable contact lens cases, as well as oil and fragrance-free soap dispensers. Several hand-cleaning products on the market are specifically formulated for contact lens application and use.

As mentioned previously, be prepared to supply each patient a new starter kit prior to any contact lens delivery accompanied by complete care instructions to prevent miscommunication. Avoid leaving open bottles of contact lens solutions or eye drops of any kind in the dispensing area; NEVER re-use a contact lens case (both could lead to

providing a possible site for contamination from previous patient use.) Do not boil or heat cases as some plastics tend to leach chemicals when they are exposed to high temperatures.

Discourage the use of bar soap, this is another site for bacterial contamination. Wash hands in front of all patients with the preferred hand soap recommend and have them observe. Be prepared to glove or use a finger cot if you have any open sores or wounds on your hands. This action will protect the staff as well.

Current patient training brochures and educational aids should also be provided



## **CONCLUSION**

The contact lens dispensary can be a profitable part of the practice especially if the practice promotes specializing in challenging contact lens fits. Patients can't easily obtain custom prescribed lenses on the internet or through non-licensed providers.

Patients appreciate the practice that can serve all their visual needs in a friendly and professional manner. Offering specialty lenses and services is a terrific referral source and helps keep existing patients loyal by offering services that they can't get elsewhere.

Be prepared to offer current products and services. If the practice offers an Optical dispensary, the happy contact lens wearer will generally shop the dispensary and purchase a quality pair of sunglasses as well as optional eyewear and accessories. Don't let the opportunity to upgrade slip by, listen to their needs.

Every time a patient goes outside of the office to purchase a pair of contacts or related products the practice is at risk of losing them as well as referrals and family members.

Satisfied contact lens patients purchase ancillary glasses, sunglasses, as well as refer their friends and families.... you get the picture.

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