

# New Year, New Thinking

Are you ready to change your approach to the business of premium IOLs?

BY DAWN THOMPSON

When you graduated from medical school, your biggest worries were providing quality care to patients and having plenty of them so that you could pay back your student loans. Every year, technology alters medical practice. Five years ago, it would have been hard to imagine a cataract patient's chatting online with friends, someone's using Groupon to purchase LASIK surgery, or using iPads (Apple Inc.) to educate patients. Today's innovations become tomorrow's standard of care.

Do you change your practice every time something new comes along? Do you change nothing, because you expect new modalities to fail within a year? I would argue that a wiser approach is to put on your thinking cap and commit to evaluating your practice as a business each and every day.

Thriving cataract and refractive practices must deliver more than excellent care. I am often asked what skills are necessary to succeed in the world of patient-pay procedures or, specifically, with advanced-technology IOLs (ie, toric, accommodating, and multifocal). The answer is not simple, but I will discuss a few critical points.

## BE A COMMUNICATOR

Learn how to talk the talk. Have you ever listened to one of your peers describe lens options to a patient and wondered how he or she makes it sound so easy? Your colleague has found language that he or she is comfortable using to effectively educate patients. He or she is not afraid to make a recommendation nor embarrassed by how much the options cost.

It is not easy to learn to communicate effectively, but developing this skill is important. Role play your consulting process with your staff members and be open to suggestions for improvement. If you want to practice on your own, a mirror makes a great audience, and a mobile phone provides easy access to a video recording.

## BE AN AGENT FOR CHANGE

You are the driver of change in your practice. That should not come as news to you. If you are not effecting change, chances are your staff is not either. Modify the easy things first, like not making Mrs. Smith wait 90 minutes to see you. Try filling patients' necessary waiting time with educational DVDs played in your waiting and examination rooms. Increase your educational efforts by sending out informa-

tion in advance to all prospective cataract patients. A little knowledge upfront helps shorten chair time.

## BE SOCIAL

Do not ignore the value of social media. Enhance the public's and your patients' awareness of your practice and its offerings through tools such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Blogging is also an effective way to communicate with your patients. Getting connected is simple, but managing these efforts every day is not. Assign the responsibility of keeping your social networks updated and active to someone on your staff. Alternatively, look outside for a little social media assistance. Engage a digital expert or advertising agency to manage these efforts for you. Social media will not generate tons of revenue, but your practice cannot be considered "advanced" without it.

## BE A MARKETER

Whether you want to focus on internal marketing, external marketing, or both, your practice is a business, and businesses need to be marketed to succeed. A huge cash outlay is not necessary, but you must determine how you want to raise awareness of your services and your practice among potential consumers. I use that term here, because these patients/consumers are looking for the best experience available. Do you have a way to reach them outside the office, on the Web, in the waiting room, in the examination room, or on the phone? If not, now is the time to connect.

## BE EXCEPTIONAL

I have been very fortunate to have visited some incredible practices around the world. The one thing their physicians and staffs all have in common is a strong desire to be exceptional. They routinely look for ways to improve the quality of their patients' care and experiences. I dare you to do the same. Start working on your list of new year's resolutions now. ■

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