

# INNOVATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Surgeons and industry work in concert to advance technology and outcomes.

## AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT J. WEINSTOCK, MD, AND NICHOLAS T. CURTIS



Many forces drive a wedge between doctors and industry: Pharma Guidelines, the Sunshine Act, and conflict of interest. Without physicians' participation, the process of advancing technology to regulatory approval can be

inefficient, however, with clinically impractical or irrelevant concepts adding unnecessary cost and time. Industry has the resources for research and development, engineering prototypes, and regulatory processes, but the physicians produce the ideas by bringing news from the clinical frontline that informs the next generation of weaponry in the fight for better vision. Collaboration between physicians and industry is unquestionably beneficial and inarguably necessary.

Although the nature of the doctor-industry relationship has changed drastically over the years, the mutual commitment to patient-centric advances drives relevant and necessary innovation in ophthalmology today. *CRST* interviewed Chief Medical Editor Robert J. Weinstock, MD, and Nicholas T. Curtis, CEO of Lensar, to learn about the collaborative relationship between surgeons and manufacturers. The two recently worked together to advance the laser cataract procedure.

**CRST:** What is the inherent benefit of a collaborative effort between physicians and industry?

**RW:** There is tremendous value in collaboration, especially for patients and the advance of medicine. There is also a value to the company's financial success as well as physicians' professional development. The relationships between industry and physicians, however, continues to evolve, and there is much less compensation than in the past. The days of large consulting compensation packages are gone. With all the regulation, oversight, and modest compensation for being a consultant, there is almost a disincentive to be involved in innovation. Those who work closely with industry do so mostly for their own innovative drive and enjoyment of the process. It is a shame that the environment has changed and is not as conducive as it once was to physicians' involvement in corporate direction.

**NC:** These relationships are not glamorous. The physicians we work with give up a lot of their time, because they are genuinely committed to the success of the technology and

want to be a part of it. Honestly, if our doctors were focused on making money, they would be better served [by] putting their time and energy into their practices and clinics, where the compensation is commensurate with their investment.

From my perspective, relationships with physicians are critically important, even vital. The reality is that corporate think tanks often operate in the abstract and, consequently, often miss the clinical mark. We must not lose sight of the importance of patients in the quest for advancing technology. Working with physicians toward a common good establishes the trust that is needed to ensure that industry is on target both clinically and practically.

**CRST:** For Lensar, Streamline (see Dr. Mark Packer's article from the July issue on Streamline <http://crstoday.com/2015/07/intelligent-integration-for-optimal-outcomes>) is the latest result of collaboration. What was that process like for both of you?

**NC:** It came about in stages, working with a group of young, driven surgeons with an appetite for new technology. Once the laser platform was in their hands, they began the work of validating the technology and identifying areas for improvement. This provided a significant opportunity to get feedback from the clinical frontline.

Immediately after launching the Lensar laser system, we began to question what's next. One of the benefits of being an independent manufacturer is the ability to quickly innovate; the downside is you have to pick and choose. Our



## AT A GLANCE

- Physicians who work closely with industry do so mostly for their own innovative drive and enjoyment of the process.
- Working with physicians toward a common good establishes the trust that is needed to ensure that industry is on target both clinically and practically.
- Larger companies have to weigh the impact on their current portfolio of products and, therefore, are more prone to make iterative changes, whereas small companies look to be more disruptive by taking on larger leaps in innovation.

