

Community Outreach

Finding ways to continue helping patients and the community.

BY LISA K. FEULNER, MD, PHD; AND JEFFREY WHITMAN, MD

Home Delivery Program

BY LISA K. FEULNER, MD, PHD



At Advanced Eye Care (AEC), we have a strong commitment to the health and welfare of our community. In 2016, AEC received the Philanthropic Corporation of the Year Award from the Community of Harford County, and in 2017 we received the Harford Award for Service

from the Chamber of Commerce in our county.

Those who know me recognize that my passion extends beyond my patients and practice. I serve as a member of multiple local organizations, and community philanthropy is one of my greatest passions. Each year, AEC provides all of the nurses in the local public and private schools with a back-to-school eye care kit, which we restock as needed throughout the year. Additionally, at the beginning of each school year, I speak to the public school nurses about what they need to know about ocular emergencies.

Despite the pressures that COVID-19 has put on my own practice and livelihood, AEC continues to support the needs of our community. In mid-March, I announced to my staff that, in compliance with the recommendations of the AAO and other governing bodies, we would be closing our office except for urgent and emergent cases. Most of our staff was

furloughed; however, we continued to pay these employees' health insurance and approved use of up to 1 week of paid time off before they began the unemployment process.

I retained only three employees: an optometrist, an on-site billing person, and an administrator. My optometrist and I took on the roles of answering phones, canceling appointments, attempting to reschedule patients, setting up recalls, refilling prescriptions, obtaining prior authorizations, seeing emergency cases, and launching a telehealth system. Learning the jobs that our staff members usually perform was eye-opening, and the opportunity to speak directly to patients was revealing.

CURBSIDE TURNED HOME DELIVERY SERVICE

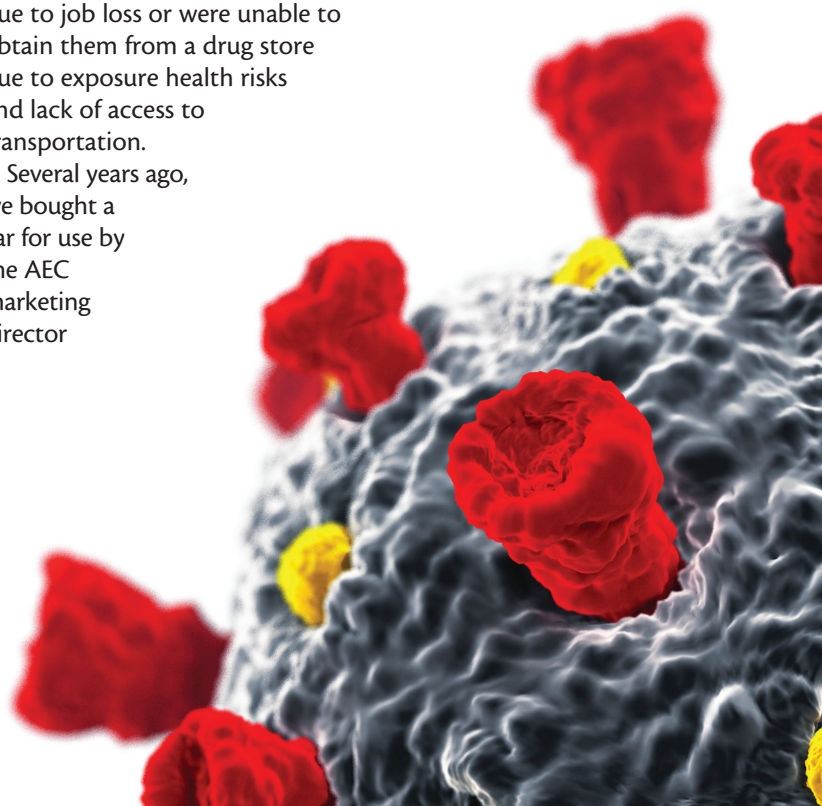
Early in our closure, we initiated a curbside delivery system to provide patients with dry eye products, contact lenses, and replacement glasses. We triaged phone calls, reviewed our schedules for each day, and made virtual check-in calls to patients who had urgent follow-up appointments. It quickly became apparent through our now direct communication with patients that many of them could no longer afford their medications due to job loss or were unable to obtain them from a drug store due to exposure health risks and lack of access to transportation.

Several years ago, we bought a car for use by the AEC marketing director

Figure courtesy of Lisa K. Feulner, MD, PhD



Figure. Dr. Feulner and her staff make 16 to 18 home delivery visits every Friday.



to visit optometric and physician practices. We decided to use this car to deliver much-needed sample prescription medicines and supplies to patients at home (Figure). With the help of our industry partners, we have continued this practice every Friday, making 16 to 18 home delivery visits in our county and sometimes to patients in quite distant locations across the border in Pennsylvania.

We implemented a strict no-spread protocol to ensure that the products and delivery system are as safe as possible. This includes wearing gloves and masks and wiping down all products before delivering them to patients' doors in one of our AEC marketing bags, which were designed to include our logo, phone number, and website. We also include a slip of paper asking patients to

review us online through Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. The response from patients and the community has been overwhelmingly positive.

HOME VISITS

As we work toward reopening our office, we are considering offering home visits for high-risk patients. For our glaucoma patients, we are considering doing home IOP checks. We hope to be able to continue these services until life returns to the new normal. The days of doctors' home visits may be returning.

We are grateful for the generous support we have received from our industry partners. Without them, we could not have helped our community as abundantly as we have.

Giving Back in Dallas

BY JEFFREY WHITMAN, MD



I am writing this while sitting at my clinic desk in Dallas after seeing a total of three urgent patients today (April 1). Just like many of my colleagues, I did not have a lot of ophthalmology to practice during this time. So, what did I do?

Well, my practice has started to serve our patients via telemedicine, and initially I worked with other doctors around the country to figure out how to do this in a practical and accurate way. I also worked with older patients and friends, showing them how to stream and to use Zoom (Zoom Video Communications) and FaceTime (Apple) to communicate, not only with doctors but also with others in their community to prevent total isolation during this time of social distancing—this does not mean that anyone needs to become socially distant.

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DONATING MASKS

Also, I found a way to help our emergency department and intensive care unit personnel and first responders—beyond donating to various related relief funds, such as ones that bring meals to hospital workers. My practice was fortunate enough to locate a quantity of N95 masks in late March, which we purchased. We then donated more than 1,100 of them to a local hospital (see *Watch It Now*). I am currently looking for more.

We continue to find ways to help our patients and our community during these difficult times. ■

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