



PAYING IT FORWARD

Ophthalmologists can provide life-changing results for patients. With our highly skilled services, however, come costs that can be prohibitive. Thankfully, when patients cannot pay for the services they need, many practitioners are willing to seek opportunities to provide compassionate care. This issue of *CRST* features several of these stories in ophthalmology, and, in the spirit of the issue, I share my own in this editorial.

Medical professionals sometimes face tense situations in which patients are unhappy with their care. When this occurs, the best tactic is to take immediate action to defuse the situation. Offering a refund for the services provided should be employed only when all other possible solutions have failed to appease the unhappy patient. In many situations, a refund is illogical or even impossible depending on the details of the insurance contract. Another common situation is that the practitioner believes on principle that a refund is not appropriate for a given circumstance.

Sometimes, the practice may be at an impasse with the unhappy patient about how to proceed financially. This can happen if the patient feels that the practice should not receive payment but does not desire a refund. In this scenario, the only way forward is often to agree to disagree, which is not ideal.

An alternative solution for situations such as this is a program my practice recently implemented called the *Pay It Forward Policy*, which serves both as an avenue to compassionate care and a solution to tense situations with unhappy patients. We recently employed the policy to appease a patient who was dissatisfied with their care and did not want the practice to profit from it. Because the patient did not want a refund, we offered to donate a free eye surgery in their name to a person in need.

Paying it forward in this way can allow an unhappy patient to feel better about their circumstance and understand that something good will come from it. Knowing that care will be provided to a patient in need may also allow the unhappy party to see their situation in a new light, potentially lessening their dissatisfaction.

Functionally, paying it forward can solve two problems at once—providing care to someone who might otherwise be unable to obtain it and defusing tensions between a practice and an unhappy patient. It takes two negative situations and turns them into something that all parties can feel good about.

Providing compassionate care is an opportunity for medical professionals to improve the lives of the members of our communities who are most in need. There are so many ways to go about providing this service, as evidenced by the articles in this issue. We should strive not to overlook these opportunities and choose instead to seek them out, as my practice has done with its Pay It Forward Policy. ■

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William F. Wiley, M.D." with a horizontal line underneath.

WILLIAM F. WILEY, MD | CHIEF MEDICAL EDITOR