

BUILDING EYE CENTERS OF TENNESSEE



Family legacy, diverse expertise, and patient-centered care

BY MICHAEL PATTERSON, DO

The story of Eye Centers of Tennessee is one of growth, vision, and family legacy. My entry into ophthalmology was not just a professional choice; it was also a continuation of a dream that began in 1988 with my father, Larry Patterson, MD. He started our practice with the simplest of setups: a single room that served as an office, a waiting room no larger than a closet, and one exam room. This modest beginning was the seed from which our practice has grown.

When I joined the practice 7 years ago, it had already expanded significantly to four offices with six doctors, but there was still ample room for growth. I therefore embarked on a path of strategic expansion to eight locations staffed by 15 doctors. I am proud of how far we have come, and we are not stopping there.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF MUTUAL FUND OPHTHALMOLOGY

One principle has guided the evolution of Eye Centers of Tennessee, something I like to call *mutual fund ophthalmology*.

It is based on the principles of stable investment and has been pivotal to the practice's expansion and resilience.

The philosophy is akin to selecting an index fund to gain stable, broad-based returns without significant risks. We provide a comprehensive range of ophthalmic services, from MIGS and ophthalmoplastics to cataract surgery. This diversity allows us to maintain a robust practice that is resilient to market fluctuations in any one area of ophthalmology.

Our practice has a small team of surgeons who are highly skilled across various procedures. This approach not only enhances the quality of care we provide but also ensures efficiency and high volumes. For example, our surgical frequencies match or exceed the norm, with a high volume of corneal transplants, glaucoma surgeries, oculoplastic procedures, and cataract surgeries performed each week.

THE POWER OF COMPREHENSIVE SERVICE AND A RAPID RESPONSE

The cornerstone of our patient-centered approach is the convenience of receiving a complete range of ophthalmic care

without having to shuttle among multiple specialists. Our elderly patients and their family members greatly appreciate the ease of having multiple diagnoses addressed in a single location. We have heard countless patients express relief that they can receive comprehensive care without traveling to different clinics. When a patient contacts us, they are seen immediately, regardless of how busy we are. This commitment to accessibility and convenience has been a game changer in our practice.

We also focus on practical aspects such as the availability of ample parking to ease the physical burden on our elderly patients. Paying attention to seemingly small details can significantly improve the patient experience.

INVESTING IN OUR TEAM: BEYOND THE BASICS

One of the most significant investments we make is in our people. Despite the rising costs of staffing, we compensate our team generously. This philosophy aligns with Richard Branson's approach at Virgin: Investing in your people, even if it seems financially challenging initially, leads to greater rewards.



► VISIONARIES IN PRACTICE

I firmly believe that a positive work environment is not just beneficial but essential for both our patients and our team. This belief shapes every aspect of our practice.

Going beyond financial efficiency. Many practices operate on a lean model. We chose a different route. We aim to be at least one employee ahead in every department. This approach may seem counterintuitive and inefficient to some. By ensuring that our staff is not overburdened, however, we maintain high morale and prevent burnout, which promotes better patient care and creates a more pleasant work environment for our team.

Extraordinary benefits for staff. Our commitment to our staff's well-being is also reflected in the benefits we offer. These include not only standard health insurance, health savings accounts, and 401(k) plans but also perks that are rare in today's workplace. For instance, we provide uniforms to our staff and replace them as needed, and a catered lunch is provided daily for all employees across our eight offices.

Celebrating loyalty and dedication. We reward loyalty and dedication. Every 5 years, our employees are treated to a trip to Hawaii with their spouse—a tradition that has become a cherished part of our practice's culture. We have also hosted large-scale family events, such as a fully paid trip to Dollywood for our staff and their families. These gestures of appreciation demonstrate our commitment to our team's happiness.

Fostering work-life balance. Our practice is family-oriented. Work hours are reasonable, which allows our team to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Similarly, our doctors are encouraged to prioritize their personal lives and family time.

IMPACT ON PATIENT CARE

We have found that a positive work environment has a direct and powerful impact on patient care. Staff members who feel happy, rested, and valued deliver exceptional patient experiences. Our patients, in turn, appreciate the dedicated personalized care they receive. Our aim is to make them feel valued and cared for from the moment they walk in until the moment they leave.

Our approach is not focused on immediate financial gains. The goal is building a loyal patient base that returns year after year and recommends us to their families and friends. In an age of digital marketing, we find that word-of-mouth referrals, born out of excellent patient experiences, are our most powerful tool. ■

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- Financial disclosure: None