

The Patient Experience

How ECPs are using new technologies to engage and educate patients



BY ANDREW KARP / GROUP EDITOR, LENSES + TECHNOLOGY

NEW YORK—What do eyecare patients expect when they visit their eye doctor or optician? Excellent care, top notch service, a good selection of top quality products and reasonable prices usually top their list of priorities.

Yet fulfilling those basic requirements may no longer be enough to attract and retain patients. In an information-intensive, 24-7 world where we're constantly online and connected with smartphones, tablets, mobile apps and GPS, many patients now expect their eyecare experience to be just as technologically advanced as they are.

"People demand that you have technology these days," observed Scot Morris, OD, a private practitioner based in Conifer, Colo. "In many cases, technology runs their life, and they expect their doctors to have it, too." Dr. Morris' observations underscore a major change in the way eyecare and eyewear is being delivered. He and other eyecare practitioners say patients are seeking a

high-tech, high-touch experience that engages and educates them.

Consequently, a growing number of ECPs are investing in technologies that help patients learn more about their ocular health and better understand their treatment options and product choices. Today's ECPs are using advanced technologies to create a more involving, personalized eyecare experience—employing everything from iPads that play videos explaining the latest cataract surgeries to diagnostic systems that display close-up retinal images to recall systems that text patients about their upcoming appointment to sophisticated dispensing systems.

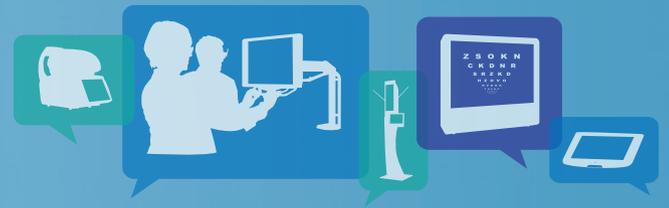
ECPs are also employing new tools and strategies to minimize patients' wait time and maximize the value of their consultation with the doctor. Their goal is to elevate the level of patient care while improving the efficiency and, ultimately, the profitability of their practice.

EDUCATING THE PATIENT

Patients are better informed about their eye health than ever before, thanks to the many online resources now available to consumers. But that's only a starting point. Doctors must still provide detailed explanations of new procedures and products and advise patients about which options are best for them.

Although many doctors rely on in-office videos, often supplied by vendors, as discussion aids, advanced production techniques and new delivery systems such as iPads are making video an increasingly valuable educational tool. One popular choice is Eyemaginations' Luma software. Available in video form and as an iPad app, Luma is driven by 3D-animated visuals and an intuitive interface. The latest version of the app includes a vision simulator that allows patients to experience vision with a variety of eye conditions. Doctors say

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Educating and Engaging Patients With Technology

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such tools help them present complex information to patients in a way that's accessible and easy-to-understand.

Andrew Morgenstern, OD, uses Luma at Washington Eye Physicians and Surgeons, a busy practice in Chevy Chase, Md. with nine ophthalmologists and two optometrists on staff. "We have a couple of dedicated iPads that we bring into the exam room to show patients," said Dr. Morgenstern. "If a picture is worth a thousand words, a video is worth a million. It lets them understand the disease and the solution, and it helps them formulate questions."

Dr. Morgenstern said Luma helps him with documentation while providing the patient with useful information. "If we documented in a chart that a patient saw a video, the patient can't later say 'you didn't tell me.' Also, the video provides consistent messaging, which is great." Dr. Morgenstern said the Eyemaginations platform also allows his staff to e-mail videos to patients pre-operatively or pre-appointment, upon request.

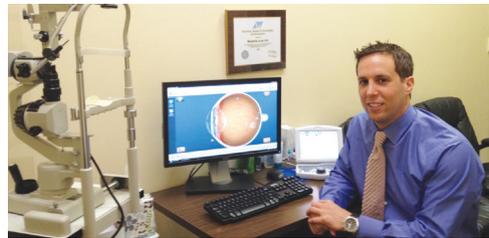


Dr. Andrew Morgenstern.

Dr. Morgenstern said investing in technology such as Luma reinforces the idea that his practice, which is in an upscale neighborhood, is providing superior care. "Perception is reality," he observed. "If your patient thinks your practice is high tech, those patients are going to be your ambassadors of referral."

Richard Levin, OD, of Total Vision, a Pikesville, Md.-based practice with five locations, also relies on Luma to teach patients about new products and procedures. He said a major benefit of this approach is improved patient flow. "One of the hardest parts of our job is patient education," he noted. "It can be

very tedious. That's what locks us up and prevents us from seeing the next patient more quickly."



Dr. Richard Levin educates patients with ocular images such as this one shown on Eyemaginations' Luma system.

Dr. Levin uses Luma to educate patients about premium intraocular lenses, which are an important part of his practice. He likes being able to send patients a post-appointment video that includes testimonials from patients who have successfully undergone cataract surgery and had an upgraded IOL implanted. "Patients are often scared after their office visit, but then they see video, which explains the mechanical aspects of how the lens works and has testimonials. This desensitizes them. Now they understand and want it. The patients are happier. In turn, our conversion rate is close to 40 percent for upgraded IOLs versus the national average, which is about 15 percent. It's better for them clinically, and it's very profitable for the practice."

Dr. Levin said Luma is also helpful when prescribing Ophthonix lenses, which require doctors to measure the patient's higher order aberrations using a special aberrometer. Luma lets him show the patient how the process works by illustrating how light passes through the eye.

The results have been impressive, he said. "At first, we were only selling a couple of iZon lenses a month. Now we're up to 40 a month. As with the IOLs, there's a very significant profit margin with insurance. We've built our practice on enhancing the patient experience," Dr. Levin remarked. "My apples are the same apples that everyone else

offers, but it's how we deliver them to the patient that differentiates us."

Other companies are also offering refraction systems that feature new, patient-friendly technology. One such system, i.Scription by Zeiss, incorporates technology for measuring, designing and dispensing eyeglasses. Introduced in the U.S. in late 2010 by Carl Zeiss Vision and VSP Vision Care, i.Scription employs wavefront aberrometry to generate a compensated prescription that can be used to design a new type of customized lens. These lenses deliver better night vision, improved contrast and richer color perception to eyeglass wearers, according to Zeiss.

i.Scription technology consists of three elements: i.Profiler^{Plus} by Zeiss, an instrument that combines corneal topography, autorefraction and aberrometry; i.Scription software, an algorithm that combines the aberrometry data from i.Profiler^{Plus} with the doctor's subjective refraction to create a prescription that is accurate to 1/100th of a diopter and is optimized for the effects of the patient's high-order aberrations; and for dispensing Zeiss and VSP Reveal free-form customized lenses.

Steve Klein, OD of Total Vision Care, which operates two locations in San Diego, Calif. likes the Zeiss technology because it helps him personalize the

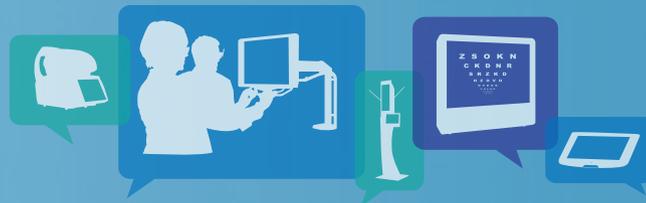


i.Profiler^{Plus} by Zeiss is a three-in-one-system.

patient experience in his practice. "With the i.Profiler, I review the test results on screen with patients," said Dr. Klein. "The unit captures different pupil sizes, so I show them day vision versus night vision, which I think is a critical component. Patients may not understand why their vision is blurred at night. We can show them why their vision is different with a small pupil versus a large pupil."

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Leveraging the Power of the Image

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Dr. Klein said his patients are impressed with the Zeiss technology. “It captures data so quickly. Each new version of the equipment seems to get quicker and easier for patients. We’ve always tried to stay on the leading edge of technology,” he said. “Patients are aware of this, and they make comments during the exam. The onus is upon our team to explain to patients what new features this new equipment has, and what benefits they get. By the time the patient is in the exam room, they’re well aware of what these features are, and the benefits of having a more personalized prescription.”

Another new refractive system is the PSF Refractor from VMax Vision. The company claims the PSF Refractor has higher sensitivity, greater accuracy and is faster and easier to operate than a traditional phoropter. Its Point Spread Function corrects refractive errors and neutralizes higher order aberrations. Active patient participation makes it easy to refine vision to the best possible end point, according to VMax. The PSF Refractor also offers a Subjective Nighttime Refraction designed to help patients with nighttime vision problems. Used in concert with VMax’s proprietary Enception progressive and single vision lenses, it creates a customized vision correction system.

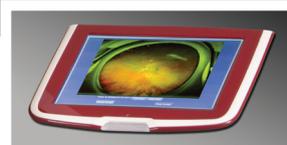
IN THE EXAM LANE, SEEING IS BELIEVING

In addition to using educational videos to inform patients about general eye health topics, ECPs are using a new generation of diagnostic instruments to provide patients with personalized perspective. Instruments such as aberrometers, retinal scanners and corneal topographers can capture and display detailed images of a patient’s eye, enabling doctors to spot and point out to patients any conditions that may require treatment.

Jerome Sherman, OD, relies on an Optos retinal imaging system to help him spot and diagnose



Optos’s new Daytona retinal imaging system features a Mac-like design.



An optomap taken by the Optos Daytona.

hemorrhaging in the back of the eye, abnormal looking freckles, or other potential health issues. Using the vivid, 3D-like images of the retina—known as an optomap—that are captured by the system, he counsels patients and educates them about their ocular health.

“If a patient comes in for first time, if it’s a referral, for example, I may not get to see them initially,” said Dr. Sherman, who is a Distinguished Teaching Professor at the SUNY College of Optometry and is also in private practice at the New York Eye Institute and Laser Center. “The staff takes their basic history and performs a visual acuity, air puff tonometry and retinal imaging with the Optos system. When I walk into the exam room, I see the reason for the referral and the best corrected visual acuity. The Optos images have already been taken and are being displayed on a 40-inch monitor.

“I’ll speak with the patient briefly while I have the images in front of me. I might say, ‘Mrs. Jones, this is your optic nerve, this is your macula, these are your blood vessels.’ As I look, I may see a whole series of abnormalities, so I start diagnosing, telling the patient what I’m seeing.”

Dr. Sherman also uses the Optos system to do a “fly through.” “We’re flying through the pupil to show them the inside of their eye,” he explained. “It’s dramatic. I’ve never seen a patient who was not impressed with it or didn’t understand it.” Sherman added that the Daytona also makes it faster and easier for patients to maneuver to get the proper head alignment. “They can almost do the test themselves, and that gets them involved in the experience,” he said.

Patients are not only wowed by the retinal imaging capabilities of the Daytona system, they are also impressed with its sleek appearance. “A lot of patients think it looks like the newest iPad or Mac instead of an eye instrument,” said Dr. Sherman. “It’s very slick. People can relate to its aesthetics.”

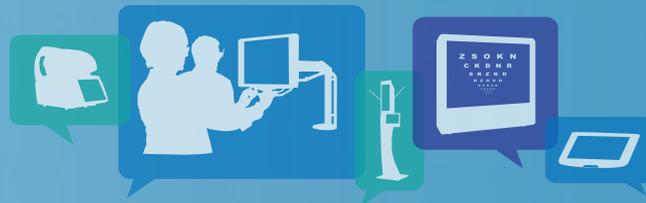
Kathleen Andersen, OD employs several different diagnostic technologies in her practice, RSM Vision in Rancho Santa Margarita, Calif. “I had a diabetic patient who wouldn’t change his diet,” she said. “So I took a picture of him with my retinal camera, and showed him the bleeding in the back of his eye. I told him that because of his diabetic retinopathy he was at a greater risk for stroke.” He reflected a bit after the exam, and said, ‘My retinal specialist didn’t do that for me.’ It’s so much easier when you can play show and tell with a patient,” she remarked.

Dr. Andersen said she is always on the lookout for new diagnostic tools that enable her to take a broader look at a patient’s overall health. Last



Dr. Kathleen Andersen.

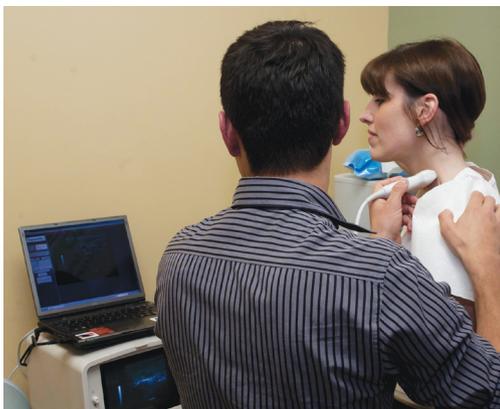
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New Dispensing Systems Measure Up

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year, she became the first optometrist in the country to install Heartsmart, a device that tests the thickness of the lining of the carotid artery, which carries blood to the brain. “It gives us a way to look at what the rest of the patient’s body is doing,” she explained. “For example, we can tell if they’re at greater risk for heart attack or stroke.”



A technician at RSM Vision scans a patient’s carotid artery with a Heartsmart device.

Dr. Andersen recently began using another new tool called DocPIES EyeCare, an iPad application devoted to in-office patient education and communication. Developed by the creators of Heartsmart, DocPIES can also be used to train patients on patient care procedures such as how to put on contact lenses for the first time. The app features two modules. One is an integrated check-in with a patient interview that replaces a clipboard, pencil and paper-based check-in form. It dynamically delivers questions and patient education based on the patient’s answers enhancing the practitioners understanding of the patients’ needs and lifestyle. The other module is a patient experience survey that assists the practice in automating patient feedback.

“I’m really impressed with the technology,” said Dr. Andersen. “I don’t have to write, I can just click

off the patient’s health care profile. We also use it for general patient education.” Dr. Andersen said being at the forefront of technology helps her project a positive image of herself and her practice. “The technology lets them know, ‘This is who we are, and this is how we plan to manage your eye care. Patients sense my excitement about it.’”

Although ECPs are using imaging systems, videos and other new technologies to engage and educate adult patients, pediatric patients need to be engaged on a different level. M&S Technologies, a supplier of vision testing systems, offers hardware that lets children watch videos while they are having a fixation test or retinoscopy.

“It can be hard for a child to fixate on a screen, let alone someone with ADD or ADHD,” said company president Joe Marino. “Our technology engages the patient with a video that appears on the whole screen. It replaces a traditional Snellen chart. You simply need the child to focus forward. That gives the doctor the ability to look in back of the eye.” Marino said the eyecare practice provides the video, which will vary by age group. “Babies are going to be fixated by Baby Beethoven. An older child might be interested in *Toy Story* or *Shrek*.” He added that M&S’s systems integrate seamlessly with content providers such as Eyemaginations and Eyemotion.

ENHANCING THE DISPENSING EXPERIENCE

As much as new technologies are changing the eye exam experience for patients, they are having just as significant an impact on the dispensing process. Much of the recent innovation has involved sophisticated dispensing systems that take precise position-of-wear measurements, and, in some cases, additional biometric measurements, to guarantee an optimal frame fit. This, in turn, ensures that patients who wear advanced, digitally designed and manufactured lenses will get the maximum performance from them. Some dispensing systems also incorporate features that allow patients to capture

and send images of themselves trying on frames.

One popular dispensing system is i.Terminal by Carl Zeiss Vision, which is part of Zeiss’ i.Scription system. Both the original i.Terminal and the newly redesigned i.Terminal2 can take personal measurements with 0.1mm accuracy. They use the patient’s own image to aid frame selection and demonstrate premium lens options.

Dr. Klein of Total Vision Care said his patients like the i.Terminal, adding that the system helps his staff dispense customized Zeiss lenses such as Zeiss Individual. “Before we had an iTerminal, our opticians were using pens to dot the lenses,” he recalled. “This is such a contrast.”

Essilor’s entry into the field of high tech dispensing is the Visioffice System. The system offers several benefits for patients, including precise measurement for better lenses, improved patient experience through education and frame selection and personalized vision provided by the exclusive Essilor products such as Varilux Ipseo IV, Varilux eyecode, Varilux Physio Enhanced eyecode, and Essilor eyecode single vision lenses.

Since introducing Visioffice in 2010, Essilor has installed about 1,200 systems across the U.S., including one at Prado Vision and Lasik Center in Tampa, Fla. “If you’re going to ask someone to get a custom-made lens, that patient is going to expect to be measured with something a little more precise than a Sharpie and a ruler,” said Prado’s Salvatore Musumeci, OD, FAAO. “That technology has been around since the caveman.”

Dr. Musumeci said Visioffice has been an important factor in boosting sales of premium lenses. He also likes the fact that the sleek looking unit grabs the attention of his patients. “I stress to our optical staff, it’s not just about a patient sitting in the chair at particular time. It’s about the 40 other people there who are picking out glasses. That’s why we have mandated that regardless of what lens the

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The Digital Difference

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patient picks, they get measured with the Visioffice. We know it's going to spark conversation. It has a 'wow' factor."

Another Visioffice user, Dr. Scot Morris of Eye Consultants of Colorado, concurred. "Visioffice has a very big cool factor," he said. "We're one of the most high tech offices in U.S., and it blends with everything we do. It reinforces our image because it represents precision and reproducibility in terms of measurements. The large majority of patients come in and say, 'These lenses are way better than our old lenses.'"

Dr. Musumeci said his staff also uses Visioffice to show patients educational videos. Some patients also like the system's ability to photograph them in a particular frame and then email the photo to friends or a spouse.



Dr. Sakatore Musumeci, (c), uses Essilor's Visioffice system to measure a patient, while another patient uses the system's imaging feature.

particular frame and then email the photo to friends or a spouse.

"There's nothing worse than picking out eyeglasses and having your wife say, 'What were you thinking?'" With Visioffice, we're able to either print out comparisons that patients can take them with them, or send images via

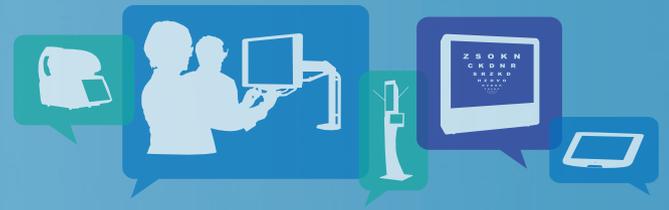
email. Then the patient has a conversation or sends a text message," said Dr. Musumeci, adding "It's raised the bar for the level of service in our office."

Although high tech dispensing systems were first embraced by independent eyecare practices allied with major spectacle lens vendors, some optical retail chains are now introducing their own proprietary systems. Most notably, LensCrafters has introduced its Accufit Digital Measurement System.

The Accufit system consists of three elements: a unit that digitally measures the relationship between a patient's eyes, face, and frame in order to get a better lens fit; a lens simulator, and a virtual mirror that takes digital images of the patient. Since unveiling Accufit in September, 2011, the Cincinnati-based retailer has installed the system in nearly all of its 950 stores in North America, according to Cyndy Dinius, senior director of product innovation and commercialization at LensCrafters. She said each store, on average, has four to five Accufit systems that are integrated into fitting counters.

"We look at it as a holistic experience," said Dinius. "We want to make sure the customer loves their eyewear when they leave the store. We ensure they're confident in making the best lens choice, and that their lenses are placed accurately in their frames. It's integral to how we do business." Dinius said that introducing Accufit has resulted in "meaningful gains in customer satisfaction." She said customers are "delighted and engaged" by the system, and are more confident of their eye-

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Creating Perfect Fitting Eyewear

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wear choices. “They view our associates as more skilled and knowledgeable,” she added.

Dinius said LensCrafters will continue to upgrade Accufit, although she did not offer specifics. However, LensCrafters’ parent company, Luxottica, is already looking at more ways to enhance the patient experience at the retail chain. Last month, at Luxottica’s annual investor and analyst presentation meeting, Mark Weikel, president and general manager, LensCrafters, provided a glimpse of the company’s plans.



A LensCrafters associate uses the Accufit system to show a patient how she looks wearing various eyewear styles.

“We want to transform LensCrafters to provide a signature customer experience,” said Weikel. He said the company is exploring a more contemporary service model that will feature a new store design along with a “next generation digital eye exam” and digital lens surfacing technology.

Weikel said LensCrafters has piloted “a contemporary interpretation of a customer experience model centered on a digital ‘omni-channel’ experience.” He noted that the company’s key initiatives for 2012 also include “a new selling model” and “an in-store digital experience pilot involving the store front, waiting area, screening area and exam room.”

Hoya Vision Care is taking a different approach to the fitting process. Rather than concentrating on eyeglass fit, Hoya offers a frame-and-lens system that minimizes stress in the lens, thereby eliminating distortion. The system, known as Hoya DF (Distortion-Free Optics), integrates Hoya’s ultra lightweight and

durable Phoenix lenses, its proprietary free-form designs and Super HiVision Ex3 AR coating and Avantek’s patented mounting technology, which eliminates the need for obstructive screws, wires or rims.

Since its introduction last fall, Hoya DF has met with acclaim, having been voted best new product by attendees at last month’s International Vision Expo East in New York. Blink Vision by Veatch in Coralville, Iowa, is an early adopter of the system. “One of our patients’ primary concerns is looking for eyewear that is lightweight and durable,” explained optician Deb Jordan. “We’ve had a great amount of success with Hoya DF. It’s virtually like wearing no glasses at all.”

Ryan Veatch, OD, said he and his staff ask patients to describe their eyewear likes and dislikes. “If weight comes up, or they say they don’t like wearing glasses because they give them headaches or pull on their ears, they’re good candidates for Hoya DF.”

Dr. Veatch said the Hoya DF system has broad patient appeal. “We’ve sold the Hoya glasses to many types of patients, including contact wearers not wild about wearing glasses, or patients who have sensitive noses and ears and hate the weight of conventional glasses,” he said. “For these patients, there’s a big ‘wow’ factor.” He noted that his staff uses a polariscope provided by Hoya to demonstrate the lack of stress in the Hoya lenses as well as the distortion in their current lenses.



Dr. Ryan Veatch and Deb Jordan with Hoya DF eyewear.

GOING BEYOND BRICK AND MORTAR

A growing number of eyecare practices are taking advantage of smart phones, email and text messaging to stay connected with the patients who are at home,

at work, or otherwise on the move. Using specially designed software, they are scheduling appointments, reminding patients of their appointments, informing patients about new products or upcoming events, or answering questions after hours. Many practices are also using social networks to foster a dialogue with patients.

Kevin Gee, OD, a private practitioner in Missouri City, Texas, favors the Solution Reach system, formerly known as Smile Reminder, for communicating with patients and posting to Twitter and Facebook. His staff sends patients multiple appointment confirmation messages by email and text, a technique he said is particularly effective.

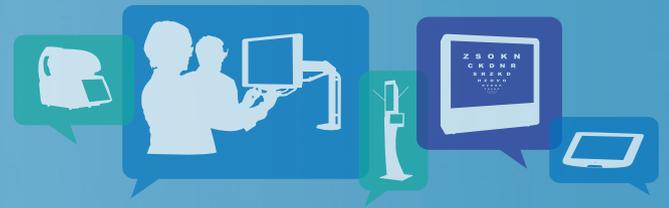
“We send out confirmations a week ahead, two days ahead and three hours ahead of their appointment,” explained Dr. Gee. “If the patient confirms at one week or three days before, they get a simple reminder message after that. If, at the three-hour mark there’s no confirmation, we assume they’re not going to keep the appointment. That frees the office to take that patient off the books. No-shows usually happen within three hours,” he noted.

Dr. Gee also believes that conducting surveys of his patients is vital to helping him optimize the patient experience at his practice. “We have a 21 percent survey return rate, which is pretty good. These questions are very specific, and patients can even rank individual staff members on their performance. We send a follow up email after an appointment, which is automated thru SolutionReach. Patients have the opportunity to send their comments, which get posted to a review website as well as to Google. Reviews are quite vital. We call it the glass ceiling. It keeps everyone accountable, including the doctor.”

Several other vendors offer tools to help the practice assess patient feedback.

DocPIES EyeCare features a patient experience survey based on the Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (CAHPS) proto-

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ECPs Respond to Patient Feedback

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col from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, a U.S. Government agency.

A new company, focalCenter, has launched a validated and standardized eyecareScore survey that provides eye doctors, clinics, optical retailers, or vision plans a standardized method for determining how their patients' experiences compare to their peers and over time. According to focalCenter president, Ron Krefman, OD, eyecareScore is a "visit-specific patient experience measure developed with the latest survey science methodology."

Wineinger Eyecare, an optometric practice in Shawnee, Kan. uses a variety of electronic tools to survey patients, send them information and schedule appointments. "We use Demandforce to text patients two hours before their appointment," said Ryan Wineinger, OD, referring to the automated marketing

and communications program that integrates with Eyefinity/OfficeMate, his practice management system. "It allows more intimate communication with our patients. We send them a text to remind them about their appointment, or when their eyewear or contact lenses are ready. It's instantaneous."

Dr. Wineinger said that sending out appointment reminders this way helps his practice run more efficiently because, "it keeps putting patients in our chairs." He also noted that using multiple methods of electronic communication to patients boosts his practice's visibility. "We send out our quarterly newsletter via email. Depending upon the time of year, we can also coordinate reminder appointment with information about sunglass trends, or remind patients to use their Flex spending. It creates a more enjoyable atmosphere for patients."

Integrating Demandforce with Eyefinity/Office-

Mate and a patient's electronic medical records allows Dr. Wineinger to easily gather information about their eye health and then email them specific information about product and treatment options. For example, he might send a 14 year-old information about wearing contact lenses in the summer while swimming.

Other program features let him read patient reviews online and access the practice's Facebook page. "When a patient comes to see us, they get a thank-you email within 24 hours. They can select a button, fill out a survey and review us on Demandforce. Those reviews get driven straight to our Facebook page and Google. We respond to every one, including a bad review." He noted that he also uses Demandforce to conduct surveys, which can include customized questions. ■

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