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Quality First

Building a reputation based on renowned research, staff development, and superior patient care.

By Laurie Brown, COMT, COE

At Drs. Fine, Hoffman & Packer, LLC, we characterize our practice as promoting quality of life rather than bottom line first. Although we are a business and must make financially responsible decisions, we base our decisions on the goals that our physicians have set for our practice. Those goals are to advance the art and science of cataract and refractive surgery by providing our patients with the highest quality service and most advanced technology. In addition, we place great emphasis on meeting our patients' needs and enriching the working environment for our employees.

SERVICE QUALITY

Our commitment to quality is evident in one particular decision that our founder, I. Howard Fine, made early in the practice's history. When foldable IOLs first became available for study, Dr. Fine decided to participate in researching them. Because these lenses were more difficult to manufacture than nonfoldable versions, they were much more expensive, and Medicare would not reimburse the extra cost. Nevertheless, Dr. Fine believed that the future of cataract surgery was small-incision procedures. As it turned out, our practice was the first in our area to offer foldable IOLs and experienced a huge boon as a result.

PROVIDING THE BEST FOR PATIENTS

The focus of our practice is cataract and refractive surgery and ophthalmic research. Our physicians, Dr. Fine; Richard Hoffman, MD; and Mark Packer, MD, are prolific teachers and authors, and they are interested in how new technology can advance the field of ophthalmology. Their efforts make new treatments available to the public earlier than at many practices in our area.

For example, our fastest-growing refractive surgery procedure is refractive lens exchange. With multifocal lenses, individuals who value binocularity can now work toward true spectacle independence. Although LASIK is a wonderful procedure and we offer it as well, for an individual over the age of 45 who wants to eliminate his dependence on spectacles, monovision is the only option, and that decreases depth perception. Only a small group of patients can tolerate the effect, however.

Our physicians are also researching implantable phakic lenses, which are quite promising. Our clinic participated in the study for the Implantable Contact Lens

(ICL; STAAR Surgical, Monrovia, CA), and, although the study has long been closed for follow-up and FDA reporting, it appears that the ICL will be the first phakic lens available on the market. Its approval will be wonderful for patients, and we have felt fortunate to be able to offer the lens to our patients during the study. I think the ICL will play a significant role in our practice in the future.

Our physicians and staff are quite attuned to patients' outcomes and what degree of correction may be possible for them in our hands (of course, no results can be guaranteed with any refractive procedure). By dedicating themselves to research and education, our physicians are able to explain to patients the exact benefits and risks associated with the procedure they choose, and patients have more surgical options here than in other practices because our doctors are comfortable with new technology.

A CONSCIENTIOUS ENVIRONMENT

Fulfilling Our Mission

We have a mission statement posted throughout our practice for both our staff and patients to read. We adhere to this statement because we feel it is important for all of our staff members to work toward the same goal, and for our patients to be aware of what that goal is. That statement is: "We are committed to providing the most technologically advanced, cost-effective patient care with the highest quality of professionalism." We refer to it often in meetings and when discussing the goals of the practice. We strongly encourage communication between all members of the practice. Employees must feel empowered about their contribution to the larger picture so that they enthusiastically provide patients with the best care.

The Right People

We choose our employees carefully; we have a saying that we don't want to hire anyone with whom we would not want to have lunch. We look for career-oriented, professional employees who treat others as they wish to be treated, are challenged by new technology, and will go the extra mile for half an inch of improvement in outcome accuracy. We want our employees to enjoy working here.

Communication

In our practice, we make communication a priority. Every 2 months, we hold full staff meetings that include every employee. These meetings have a specific agenda and a set time period. Each department head has an opportunity in the meeting to raise any concerns or mention any procedural changes that may affect other departments. We encourage the department heads to address challenges they are facing so we may brainstorm solutions. As the administrator, I have the opportunity to review general information that all staff members need to know. Also, each physician addresses the staff. Because the employees in the front office do not have as much contact with the doctors as the clinical staff, these opportunities to speak with the physicians are important. At these meetings, any staff member may voice his thoughts.

In separate monthly staff meetings, our front and back office staff members review daily administrative items and ideas on improving efficiency. In addition, our physicians conduct goal-setting sessions every 2 months to help

them maintain their focus on the practice's goals and discuss what steps they can take to achieve them.

MARKETING EFFORTS

In terms of marketing, we continually try to remind the community that we offer our patients newer treatments and better results than other practices because of our physicians' interest in technology. In our area, radio is very effective, and we advertise in newspapers to regularly remind the community of our presence. However, we recognize the importance of word-of-mouth referrals over other types of marketing, and we therefore keep our annual marketing budget within nationally recognized benchmarks.

As part of marketing our practice, we work hard to call attention to our physicians' achievements. Each time one of them participates in an important event, we use public relations efforts to inform the public. Additionally, our walls and cabinets are full of awards and materials our physicians have received for various accomplishments. A newsletter that we publish three times per year lets patients know about our physicians' and staff members' most recent activities and achievements. This newsletter seems to help patients to feel involved in our practice.

Our marketing efforts are intended to generate public awareness of our practice rather than advertise particular events. Our excellent reputation in both the local patient and medical communities helps to generate patient referrals. Over the years, this strategy has enabled us to build a large market share.

WORDS OF WISDOM

For newly established practices, I suggest planning strategically, establishing business goals, and considering every decision in the context of those goals. Having a clear vision for the future is very important. Dr. Fine likes to say, "If you don't know where you want to go, you won't get there."

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