

EVALUATION and  
MANAGEMENT of  
SPECIALTY SERVICES

SECTION

6





# Ophthalmic Dispensing

Sunny Sanders and Mark Wright

*The engine which drives enterprise is not thrift, but profit.*

John Maynard Keynes *A Treatise on Money*

Seasoned practitioners know the benefit of an optical dispensary. Some doctors mistakenly, do not hold optical dispensing in high regard. Increasingly, there are more appealing and more challenging areas of specialization within the scope of optometry. It must be remembered, however, that within the arena of primary care the majority of patients who seek the services of an optometrist do so for the purpose of refractive correction with eyeglasses. Patients do not understand the lack of interest in the mechanics of eyeglasses; any reduced status that dispensing might hold is primarily in the minds of practitioners. Patients consider eyeglasses to be an important and sometimes vital aid to vision.

It has long been understood that no matter how expert a practitioner's clinical services might be, the finished pair of glasses that are on the patient's face will be the long-lasting proof of excellent optometric care. Eyeglasses, if they are of high quality, can serve to build an excellent reputation and can become a major referral stimulus for the optometrist. Conversely, glasses that perform poorly and cause problems can be the source of many negative comments by a patient.

If these factors are not enough to encourage the student of practice management to excel in optical dispensing, it should be realized that in many practices the sale of optical materials contributes more to the typical practice's gross income than all other areas combined—about 60 cents on the dollar. A practice that does not provide dispensing services usually can double its gross income if dispensing is included.

Assuming that optical dispensing and laboratory services are delegated to technicians and assistants, it is almost always financially attractive to provide dispensing. Patients generally prefer the full-service concept of eye care, as evidenced by the fact that most independent practitioners have a very low percentage of patients who have their spectacle prescriptions filled by another dispenser. A major benefit of receiving both clinical services and optical materials from one office is that the patient only needs to turn to that office whenever a need arises or if there are any problems.

The actual duties of the selection and dispensing of eyewear are generally delegated to an optometric technician, frame stylist, or optician. This approach is a sensible one, allowing the optometrist to function at the highest level of

skill and to concentrate on the diagnosis and management of eye conditions, while serving as a supervisor with regard to optical dispensing. Many educational programs exist today for the training of technicians to completely manage and operate an optical dispensary, but the majority of individuals who perform this function are trained on the job.

## IMAGE OF THE DISPENSARY

A state-of-the-art optical dispensary is essential to the success of most practices. The look and feel of the optical dispensary can vary with the style of optometric practice and can be used to convey different images. In any form, the optical dispensary must cater to the eye care and eyewear needs of the patient and offer attractive, high-quality products.

The form of the dispensary can range from the traditional, specialized service available only to the patients of the private practice to the highly retail and commercialized optical superstore. Patients will differentiate between a retail and professional image largely on their initial impression when entering the office. If the frame display area is the first room entered from the outside, the image is largely retail. This design is often found in optometrists' offices in which the optical dispensary serves as the reception room if there is no reception room. If the outside entrance opens into a traditional reception area, the impression is one of professional eye care.

A good approach to the separation of the retail and professional aspects of a practice is to have two separate entrances—one of them leading to an optical dispensary and the other leading to the practitioner's office waiting room (Figure 28-1). This concept does provide some advantages in that it retains the professional image of a health care practitioner while still attracting patients who would like to purchase eyeglasses separately. This arrangement could incorporate the use of a separate business name for the optical dispensary. The name selected could be used in exterior signage and would allow the practitioner to feel more comfortable with the advertising of optical services in the local media. Care should be given to such external marketing. It is important to ensure that the public is being sent the desired message concerning which aspect of care is emphasized as primary and which is deemed to be secondary.



**FIGURE 28-1** Separate optical entrance . (Courtesy Eye Care Center, Fullerton, CA; photograph courtesy L. Ernie Carrillo.)

There are advantages and disadvantages to having a separate optical dispensary. In one regard, it should not be allowed to be so separate that there is no connection. The optical dispensary should be visible to the public but connected to the optometric office. When that connection is broken, so is the loyalty that retains patients and causes them to purchase optical materials from the practice. It can be desirable to have the dispensary still function under the organization of the practice. This will allow for one set of accounting records to be maintained and also allow the patient to simply write one check for clinical services and eyewear.

Having a separate optical dispensary also requires a larger staff. It is important for each entrance to have a receptionist or technician always available to greet patients when they enter. This is not only good etiquette and a custom that is expected by patients in a service-oriented business but also is necessary in the optical dispensary to prevent the problem of shoplifting.

As defined for the purposes of this discussion, optical dispensing includes the following functions:

- Lens design (and selection of options)
- Frame selection and measurements
- Ordering and verifying of eyeglasses
- Dispensing and adjusting of eyeglasses
- Maintaining and repairing of eyeglasses

The appearance of the optical dispensary is extremely important to the successful operation of the business (Figure 28-2). When a patient enters the optical dispensary, that individual becomes a consumer. Consumers make many subconscious judgments that affect their purchasing habits. The decor and appearance will influence the consumer's decision to purchase



**FIGURE 26-3** Example of computer-generated information for patients; this sample illustrates emmetropia. (Courtesy Eyemaginations, Towson, MD.)

a product and even how much the consumer will pay. The optometrist's dispensary has a distinct advantage over other optical dispensaries because the optometrist already has provided professional and clinical services to the patient and has gained the patient's trust. It is not sufficient to rely solely on this professional relationship, however, because the optical dispensary should appeal to the patient on its own. The optical dispensary must be continuously updated and periodically redecorated with additions such as wall covering or texture and color effects, floor covering or flooring, and new furniture and fixtures. Patients will judge the entire operation of a practice by what they understand, and they understand retail merchandise displays. Even though it is a considerable expense, the optical dispensary must be kept modern and tasteful. See Chapter 13 for further discussion of the design of the optical dispensary.

## FRAME DISPLAY OPTIONS

It is important to display the inventory of frames in a way that highlights them in an impressive manner. The key to eyewear sales is merchandising. Attractive displays draw patients to the dispensary. There are many options available through professional optical design companies; these companies will fabricate custom frame displays or sell ready-made ones. Frames can be displayed in categories or sections such as men's, women's, and children's groupings. Additional areas can be added such as sports eyewear and nonprescription sunglasses (Figure 28-3).

Presentation and assistance by a trained optical staff member is also important. A decision should be made as to whether patients should be allowed to browse and try frames on, making the choice themselves or whether they will be seated and shown frames by the optical staff. Although some patients will prefer to be left alone, the features and advantages of certain frame designs for that particular patient and their specific needs can be explained by an optical staff, ensuring the best result for the patient and compliance with the doctors recommendations.



**FIGURE 28-3** Optical boutique area. (Courtesy Eye Care Center, Fullerton, CA; photograph courtesy L. Ernie Carrillo.)

An excellent merchandising concept is to display high-end frames in a different environment. These frames can be displayed in collections. For example, certain designer lines can be grouped in their own areas. This builds brand awareness and can highlight point-of-purchase materials available from the optical manufacturers. Using this display idea will help sales of medium- to high-priced frames because it desensitizes the consumer who might have “sticker shock”.

Manufacturers and frame suppliers can provide excellent ideas for merchandising and showcasing their products. A display kit that promotes one style of frame in several colors is appealing in any location in the dispensary. Observing the window displays and accessory displays in fine department stores is an excellent way to learn professional display techniques. Antique furniture can also provide an interesting backdrop for a more spread out merchandising effect of individual frames on pedestals.

Frames can be displayed on glass shelves that allow them to sit separately, with temples open. This frame display method tends to make a smaller inventory look larger because it is spread out. The use of frame displays generally places a larger frame inventory into a smaller space.

Dispensing tables should be readily available as a workplace for frames, clinical records and literature, a computer, and accessories (Figure 28-4). These dispensing tables also can serve as a counter so that optical measurements can be taken accurately and prescription eyeglass orders can be processed. These tables also can be the area where fees are explained and presented to the patient. The dispensing tables, which are used for frame selection, also can double as tables to be used for delivering finished eyeglasses and providing eyewear adjustments. It should be remembered, however, that the use of these tables might be in great demand, and this can make it inconvenient for patients who wish to select a frame if all tables are being used for deliveries and adjustments.

One alternative, if space permits, is to have separate dispensing counters, booths, or small private rooms to deliver and adjust eyewear (Figure 28-5). This specialized delivery and



**FIGURE 28-4** Optical dispensing area. (Courtesy Eye Care Center, Fullerton, CA; photograph courtesy L. Ernie Carrillo.)



**FIGURE 28-5** Eyeglass adjustment booths. (Courtesy Gailmard Eye Center, Munster, IN.)

dispensing section also emphasizes the service aspect of dispensing glasses. The basic dispensing tools and frame warmer can be positioned in a nearby location, preferably with a sink. This design allows the patients to see some of the basic adjustments being performed on their eyeglasses and saves the technicians the many steps that must be made to walk back and forth from a separate laboratory.

Lighting is a very important consideration in a dispensary. As experts in visual science, optometrists should display excellent lighting techniques. It is generally noted that skin tones are much more attractive to a person under incandescent or natural light. The use of recessed and track lighting or other spotlights, using incandescent and halogen bulbs, can enhance the frame and display appearance and are more flattering to patients trying on frames and viewing themselves in mirrors. General overall lighting with fluorescent lights is practical in commercial buildings but is not helpful in the fashion aspect of frame selection. However, indirect fluorescent lighting, where the light is bounced off ceilings or other surfaces, tends to make fluorescent light more pleasing. The use of daylight through skylights and windows adds a third type of lighting and can contribute to an attractive blend of all three types. One additional consideration in lighting is the use of backilluminated frame bars. This is an individual decision because, although the frame bars are quite eye appealing when frames are lit from behind, the actual color of a frame is much harder to see when displayed on these frame bars. The frame often must be removed from the frame bar and viewed in a separate light for the color to be appreciated.

Whatever the final manner of optical dispensary display chosen, the displays should be uncluttered and attractive. Use props like sculptures, stone pieces, vases, or pottery to accent various collections. Merchandising the products will increase the optical dispensary revenues.

## FRAME INVENTORY MANAGEMENT

Ordering and buying frames are described in Chapter 15. The first consideration is the number of frames that should be on display and carried in inventory. This frame number will vary

widely, from a range of approximately 500 frames in a small office to more than 3,500 frames in a typical super-optical environment. The size of the practice, the budget available, and the marketing strategy of the practitioner will dictate the number of frames to carry. The practitioner will need to consider the number of men, women, and young patients so that the appropriate percentage of frames will be carried for each category.

It is possible to display all frames, but some offices keep an additional stock so frames can be replaced. Keeping frame displays completely filled with a minimum of empty spaces makes them more attractive and appealing and also makes it easier to spot potential problems with theft. An assistant can check the frame displays every morning and be certain that all empty spots are filled with frames, even if sunglasses or safety frames must be used. It can be an advantage to the large practice to try to use frames from the frame display as much as possible rather than ordering frames to be supplied by the laboratory. This practice has the major benefit of reducing back-order problems, which often can occur without the knowledge of the optical staff and delay an order unexpectedly. Additionally, using frames directly from the frame display creates a constant turnover of inventory, which means frames will always be new and not “shopworn”.

Obviously, the optometrist (or staff members) periodically must meet with sales representatives of the frame manufacturer to buy new frames and replace those that have been sold. This meeting should be arranged by appointment, and ample time scheduled for consideration since it represents the products that will be shown and dispensed. Frame representatives can provide a valuable service by conducting an inventory of their products and keeping records of what was sold since the last purchase. There generally will be more frame vendors who wish to do business with the optometrist than the optometrist can reasonably manage. It is generally necessary to restrict the number of vendors to those who provide the best products, service, discounts, return policies, and purchase and payment arrangements.

It can be a good strategy to provide as much business as possible to a limited number of vendors so that the practice becomes an important account to these companies. This important account relationship can result in better buying programs and discounts from the vendor.

The optometrist or staff member who buys frames must stick to a budget and not buy under pressure. The professional salesperson is very skilled at selling, and the optometrist must be able to say “no”. Based on the size of the display area, set up a specific number of frame slots for each of the vendors selected. It also is advisable to try to buy for the entire market of patients and avoid simply purchasing what the buyer personally likes. A wide range of frame prices should be available, and a good mix of frame sizes (large and small), materials (metal and plastic), and styles (conservative and high fashion) should be obtained. Creating opportunities for patients to have a wide selection of frames is important. When selecting frames be sure to include several midrange styles (\$300 to \$400). This category should represent about 35% to 40% of

the total collection. There should be about 20% to 25% high-end frames (\$600 to \$700). Patients may seek these high-end brand names so displaying these in the “collection” manner is advisable. Another aspect to this breakdown is the concept that the midrange frames will look to be a better value if the high-end frames appear costly.

Some practices have been successful in assigning frame spaces on the display to different companies. Each frame company stocks those frames they feel would be best for the practice. Every 6 months, frame usage is calculated and companies that have sold more frames are allocated more spaces on the frame displays and companies that sold fewer frames have their frame spaces taken away. The use of consigned frames is another way to limit frame inventory expenses. Some manufacturers and third-party eye care insurance providers offer frame packages at no charge that you can display in the optical dispensary. The issue here is that if a consignment frame is chosen, the frame will most likely be available from the insurance provider. This may not always be cost effective for the practitioner.

Attention must be given to older stock that has not sold; these frames should be returned within the company’s return policy. Sales representatives sometimes are not anxious to facilitate returns, so the frame manager must be attentive to this task. Another consideration when buying frames is the use of buying groups, which can help obtain better discounts for an independent practitioner when the number of purchases is small.

Many computer software programs are available for eye care practices, and these programs can provide valuable assistance in inventory management. Computer programs are useful for inventory management of frames and also can be applicable for uncut ophthalmic lenses and contact lenses. Various printed reports can be generated, and this information can make frame buying more intelligent and scientific. Of course, to obtain excellent data from the computer, considerable effort is required to input the necessary information when new frames are added and when display frames are sold. Each frame should have an inventory number or bar code placed on it that is typed in or entered by electronic wand during each transaction (Box 28-1).

#### BOX 28-1

##### Advantages of Computerized Frame Inventory Management

- Current inventory always available in wholesale or retail dollar amounts and in number of units.
- Inventory reports can be generated by frame type, manufacturer, supplier, or model.
- Inventory aging reports can list frames, quantities, and date acquired.
- Reports of frames on order or at the laboratory.
- History of sales per month by manufacturer or model.
- Reports assist buying and reordering frames, in accounting, and with theft control.

## OPHTHALMIC LENS DESIGN

Ophthalmic lens design is an aspect of dispensing that is often forced into a secondary role even though it is really more important than the selection of the frame. Patients understand the process of frame selection very well because they try on the frames and look at them and touch them. The ophthalmic lens is not as well understood because of the complexities of different types of prescriptions, the placement of optical centers, the use of oversize blanks, the need for antireflective or ultraviolet lens coatings, and the various styles of multifocals that are available. It is a good practice to begin the dispensing visit with a discussion of the lenses before frames are considered, perhaps at an in-office “lens design center”. This special area is devoted to samples and demonstration lenses in the form of uncut lens blanks and mockup eyeglasses. Box 28-2 provides some ideas on the information that can be provided in advance of the eye examination or after the doctor makes the recommendations and writes the eyeglass prescription for the patient.

The process of designing lenses and selecting options simply begins by educating the patient. It is the doctor’s and dispenser’s duty to inform each patient of the newest available technologies for ophthalmic lenses. Patients have a right to know what new products are available, and the doctor and dispenser should avoid prejudging what the patient will or will not want or is able to afford. The key to patient education is the use of demonstration items and literature. Nothing can explain different types of bifocals better than having actual demonstration eyeglasses made up with the different lens options.

### BOX 28-2

#### Lens Design Center Demonstration Items

##### UNCUT LENS BLANKS

- Grey and brown plastic tints from #1 to #5 for fashion and sunglass
- Other tint colors including rose #1 and #2 and gray/green sunglass
- Gradient tint samples
- Photochromatic plastic and glass, antireflective and polarized samples
- Glass lens coatings for color and mirror
- High-index plastic vs. CR-39 in same prescription (e.g., 6.00 D)
- Polycarbonate, high index, and aspheric lenses

##### MOCKUP SPECTACLES

- Right lens rolled and polished, left lens normal, in wire frame
- Right lens antireflective coating, left lens normal
- Progressive lenses with plano at distance and 1.50 adds
- Right lens executive bifocal, left lens FT -35
- Various bifocal and trifocal styles
- Various high-plus and minus powers in different eye size frames
- Specialty lens designs such as “Drivers,” golf glasses, or glasses designed for computer use with +0.75 distance and +1.25 near

These items also are valuable when attempting to answer questions such as, “How thick will the edges be in my frame?” or “How does this look with an antireflective coating?” or “How does a lens look when the edges are rolled and polished?” The manufacturer, for a nominal fee, can provide samples of eyeglasses or sample lens blanks. The more informed the patient, the more likely the patient will be pleased with their selections.

Doctors prescribe brand-specific contact lenses and brandspecific pharmacologic agents for patients. Likewise, doctors should prescribe brand-specific spectacle lenses for patients. Just as the doctor is required to spend more time understanding different features and benefits of contact lenses and pharmacologic agents, the doctor should also spend additional time understanding different features and benefits of spectacle lenses. Abrogating this specific prescribing to the optician harms the doctor-optician team approach to patient care, and this process is also paramount to providing a higher level of service to the patient.

Establishing an effective handoff from the doctor to the optician is essential. The ideal scenario is for the doctor to prescribe brand-specific lenses in the examination room in the presence of the optician as the treatment plan is being presented to the patient. Another effective method is for the doctor to walk the patient to the dispensary, introduce the patient to the optician, explain the treatment plan to the optician in the presence of the patient, and leave the patient with the optician to complete the treatment plan. The least effective method of handoff from the doctor to the optician is the use of a routing slip to nonverbally communicate the treatment plan.

## LIFESTYLE DISPENSING

The patient education approach leads to the concept of *lifestyle dispensing*. This term refers to finding out more about a patient’s needs in daily activities and providing additional eyewear or special lens options to help the patient with those needs. Obviously, this procedure requires more in-depth questioning with regard to patients’ occupational and vocational interests. Examples of needs that can be satisfied with lifestyle dispensing include golfing, fishing, special safety glasses for the work environment, or special reading glasses for computer use. Some practices use a printed questionnaire or interactive computer program to find out about lifestyle needs, whereas others simply use a friendly verbal interview.

A side benefit to good lens design is increased optical sales in the form of a second pair of eyeglasses, sunglasses, and lens add-on options, but the primary outcome is eyewear that provides optimal visual performance for the patient in his or her daily life. The practitioner’s philosophy will determine how much salesmanship should be used during dispensing. One must be careful not to take this technique too far so that it becomes a high-pressure sales tactic that can adversely affect the doctor-patient relationship. A good operating paradigm to guide both the doctor and the staff is “If it is good for the patient, it is good for the practice”. The patient’s well-being and enhanced visual performance should always be the primary consideration.

Technicians who serve as frame selection assistants or frame stylists should be trained to assist patients with proper frame sizes and shapes. Frame stylists must be trained to note the lens prescription first so that this information can be considered when determining the type of frame to use. Additionally, training in color, style, and the selection of proper shapes for facial features is appropriate. The state-of-the-art dispensary should be equipped with a pupillometer to measure monocular pupillary distance. The use of digital or video cameras or trial contact lenses can help patients view themselves wearing the frames that are under consideration. If trial contact lenses are placed on the patients eyes to provide the clarity to see themselves in the frame choices, the patient can make a more confident selection and may also become interested in wearing contact lenses. Use of digital or video cameras have obvious benefits as well, since seeing oneself in pictures permits angles of view that a mirror does not achieve. A digital photograph can also be printed and given to the patient to take home or electronically sent to show family and friends. The use of a digital or video camera can be somewhat time consuming, but in a high-service practice, it does create the opportunity to differentiate the practice from the competition.

## FRAME AND LENS PRICING

The most popular method for setting fees for ophthalmic materials is to use a markup system. The amount of markup can vary from 2 to 3 times the wholesale cost. Informal surveys should be performed to determine the markup rate for various ophthalmic materials in a given area. The marketing philosophy and positioning of the practice will dictate if this practice should be on the high, middle, or low end of the price scale. Frame prices can be displayed in a variety of ways. There are a number of pricing tags available, from adhesive stickers and reusable plastic slide-on tags to bar code slips. Prices can be marked on these small stickers that serve to show the patient the cost as the patient tries on frames. A popular idea is to use a clear label and apply it to the demonstration lens that comes with the frame. Lens prices generally are listed on a printed fee schedule that can be kept near the dispensing tables. This list can show different prices for the different types of lenses—spheres, spherocylinders, single-vision lenses, bifocals, and progressive addition lenses. Also, various lens options can be listed as add-on prices. Rather than providing an “ala carte” method of lens options, many practices are choosing to market “bundle or package” pricing, putting together the most common or useful lens features and options into a set price. This concept provides the patient with the most desirable features without the concept of add-ons and confusing options. Most people want simplicity. Whichever method is chosen, a quality, wholesale laboratory’s finished lens price list can be used as a guide for determining the patient’s cost for these options.

An alternative method for the pricing of frames and lenses has been the use of dispensing and prescription fees. These fees represent the profit that would be made on the service aspect of dispensing. When using these methods, optical materials

generally are priced at wholesale cost, with a slight add-on margin to allow for operational costs. Dispensing fees and a low materials fee are often used by third-party companies in an effort to control costs. It has been noted that patients might not accept dispensing fees as easily as they accept a markup on ophthalmic materials.

As part of good dispensing service, the dispenser should be trained to review and explain all fees that are charged for ophthalmic materials and if necessary, the other professional and clinical fees charged to the patient at the current visit.

## CHOOSING OPTICAL LABORATORIES

Select an optical laboratory that offers the best customer service and product quality. The laboratory pricing should not be the only determining factor. If the patient waits 2 weeks for their eyewear to be made and then there are defects or poor quality, blame will be placed on the practice, not the laboratory. This is a bad reflection on the practice as a whole. The laboratory should be able to turn around a “rush” job as well. This concept cannot be abused, but if needed, demonstrates the commitment to service to the patient (see Chapter 15).

## NONPRESCRIPTION SUNGLASSES

One area of optical dispensing that seems to be growing in interest is the provision of nonprescription sunglasses. Optometrists routinely educate patients about the importance of protection against ultraviolet radiation and the value of quality optics. This would naturally support the dispensing of nonprescription sunwear. Even though the majority of nonprescription sunwear purchases takes place in department and drug stores, there is a market for high-quality sunglasses offered through eye care professionals. A requirement for success in sales of nonprescription sunglasses is a significant investment in inventory (Figure 28-6). The consumer wants selection and variety. Historically, optometrists have not been pleased with sales of nonprescription sunglasses, but this lack of success can be due to the practice carrying a small



**FIGURE 28-6** Sunwear display showcase. (Courtesy Eye Care Center, Fullerton, CA; photograph courtesy L. Ernie Carrillo.)

inventory of sunglasses by ophthalmic frame companies that are not known by the public. Name brands have great appeal to the public. Promotion to the public might be necessary in the form of media advertising. A natural market for sunglasses is the contact lens population, who would have an interest in nonprescription sunwear.

## ADVERTISING

The advertising of dispensing services must be performed carefully so as not to adversely affect the image of a professional practice. The practitioner's "philosophy of practice" should be used to establish the goals of external marketing before any advertising campaign is started. The practitioner must consider the position of the practice first and then adopt a promotional campaign that will meet the goals of the practice image. Advertising is a major investment for a practice and speaks loudly to the public about its image. It is best to use advertising agencies for assistance, but this assistance does require a significant budget, often without a commensurate return (see Chapter 27). Frame manufacturers can provide professional camera-ready advertisements and even cooperative funding for advertising when it is performed within their guidelines.

## EYEWEAR DELIVERY

The delivery of finished prescription eyeglasses involves the services of adjustment and fitting. Office policies for the notification of patients and for the dispensing of eyewear should be adopted. Some practices offer dispensing of eyeglasses by appointment only, but this method can result in delays and inconvenience for the patient. If the practice has adequate staff members who can dispense eyeglasses, appointments will not be necessary for this rather brief service. Patients who simply walk in to pick up eyeglasses generally will understand a short wait of a few minutes. Excellent eyeglass dispensing involves the following:

- Presentation of the finished eyewear in a professional manner with appropriate case, cleaning supplies, and product literature
- Adjustment of the frame to the patient's face and head to ensure proper fit and comfort
- Instructions to the patient on the use and care of the new eyeglasses
- A review of the lens options that were ordered

The technician dispensing the eyeglasses should ask the patient about past experience on the type of eyewear that is being provided. If it is new to the patient, instructions on adaptation symptoms, as well as how to use the eyewear properly, are appropriate. A reading card should be handily available to the dispensing technician, to allow the patient to test nearpoint vision and to learn to use the different parts of multifocal lenses. An additional technique that should be included in dispensing is the routine review of special options that were incorporated into the eyeglasses. Patients forget the purpose of extra options such as antireflective coatings, photosensitive

tints, scratch-resistant coatings, and similar items, and the dispenser should use this opportunity for one last review of the options ordered and their purpose. This review also can spark referrals when the patient wears the new glasses and finds the options helpful. Patients should be instructed and encouraged to return at any time if frame adjustments are needed.

A progressive practice must be aware of the importance of the time taken to fabricate eyeglasses. It is no longer common for 2 weeks to be required to fabricate a pair of glasses, and yet some special lens designs and special frame orders can necessitate a waiting period as long or longer. The important consideration when encountering such orders is to keep the patient informed. It is very important to call the patient if any delay is encountered in the fabrication of new eyeglasses, rather than waiting for the patient to call and ask why the eyeglasses are not ready.

## EYEGLASS WARRANTIES

A more consumer-oriented approach has developed in dispensing as various marketing strategies have been adopted by optical chain stores and private practices. Eyeglass warranties have become popular and generally extend for 1 year from the date of dispensing. Sometimes an additional charge is required for such a warranty, and sometimes the warranty is provided to all patients at no additional cost. Typically, the eyeglass warranty will provide for the repair or replacement of any broken part of the frame or lenses with a "no-fault" guarantee so that no matter how the glasses are broken, a repair or replacement is made.

Sometimes these warranties can have a "1-time only" stipulation, whereas other warranties can be unlimited throughout the year. The eyeglass warranty does remove any potential disagreement about whether the eyeglasses performed adequately, were defective, or were abused by the patient. A separate warranty usually accompanies scratch-resistant plastic lenses and typically provides for replacement at no charge if the lenses are scratched within 1 year. These warranties are easy for a practitioner to provide, since both frames and scratch-resistant lenses usually are under warranty by the manufacturer. The various warranties available should be verified when setting up accounts with frame vendors and optical laboratories.

## MANAGING THE UNHAPPY PATIENT

There will always be a small percentage of patients who are unhappy with their vision or have difficulty adapting to new eyeglasses. Additionally, problems will occur in which lenses fall out and screws and temples come loose. An office policy should be established for the management of unhappy patients. The best policy is the age-old "the customer is always right" approach. Policies should be developed to easily and fairly handle an exchange for products or refund in the event a patient requests such an action, although solving the problem is a better resolution. Reasonable efforts should be made to rectify any problems the patient has as quickly as possible. Generally, job remakes and corrections should be made at no charge to the patient if they occur within a reasonable amount

of time. Assistants should allow patients to have access to the prescribing practitioner, usually with a free appointment, if complaints of a visual nature are received.

Additional optical policies could include the use of a payment plan, although the acceptance of major credit cards provides an easy way for practices to avoid offering credit to patients. It is common for the office to require at least a 50% deposit when eyeglasses are ordered, with the balance due at dispensing. Whatever policy is selected, it is vital that patients be informed in advance of what is expected of them. This philosophy can prevent awkward situations such as instances in which patients arrive to pick up glasses but are not ready to pay. It is difficult to turn patients away or to take back glasses that have just been delivered.

## STAFF AND PRACTITIONER CONSIDERATIONS

The ophthalmic dispensing staff need to be taught the core values and philosophies of the practice. They must also believe in these values. The training should not only address the technical aspect of ophthalmic dispensing but also the treatment of patients, handling patient concerns, and encouraging patient retention and referrals.

Staff should be taught how to present eyewear to patients. Superior customer service is essential if the practice is to be differentiated from the competition.

Patients are more likely to follow a practitioner's recommendations and return to the practice to purchase eyewear if the practitioner educates them during the examination. The need for certain eyewear and the reasons for prescribing are essential pieces of knowledge for the patient to accept recommendations and prescriptions. The patient relies on the doctor to explain their vision needs and the solutions for them.

After the examination is completed, the practitioner should summarize the findings, review the concerns expressed during the patient history, and explain the recommendations to handle these concerns. In the case presentation, always refer any lenses prescribed for the patient back to the patient's entering history concerns. "Mrs. Smith, remember when we began today how you described the headaches you get driving due west into the setting sun every night after work? I'm prescribing special driving sunglasses for you to help manage that problem." The doctor should then describe the specific lenses being prescribed and why they are different from any other sunglasses. The optical staff is then prepared to determine the products needed to fill the needs of the patient. The patient should be convinced that the office has their best interests in mind and is prepared to handle all their optical needs and wants.

## CONCLUSION

Offering full-scope, high-quality eye care and eyewear with a caring attitude establishes value that the patients will recognize and appreciate. Patients want services, selection, and quality that they perceive is the best.

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- [www.optometric.com](http://www.optometric.com) Online version of Optometric Management magazine, which provides articles on ophthalmic dispensing.
- [www.revoptom.com](http://www.revoptom.com) Online version of Review of Optometry magazine, which provides articles on ophthalmic dispensing.