

DEVELOPING a BUSINESS
PLAN: NEW PRACTICE,
EXPANSION, and ACQUISITION

SECTION

3





Deciding Where to Practice

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“Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?”

“That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,” said the Cheshire Cat.

“I don’t much care where—” said Alice.

“Then it doesn’t matter which way you go,” said the Cat.

Lewis Carroll *Alice in Wonderland*

How does an optometrist decide where to practice? Many choices and options exist, in terms of the type of practice and its location. Is a private group practice in the downtown of a major city—specializing in contact lenses—preferable or would a solo family practice in a small town in the rural countryside be more appealing? Would the practice of low-vision hospital-based optometry be rewarding or would a teaching career in a pediatric clinic be more interesting? Practice opportunities exist from Guam to Alaska, from England to Japan. With so many areas of the world available in which to live and work, the decision on where to locate requires serious thought and study. It also requires goal setting. If an optometrist cannot identify the type of practice and community that is preferred, attempting to determine a location will be an exercise in futility. In choosing a place to practice, individual values and lifestyle, the part of the country in which one has lived, and personal and professional goals (see Chapter 2) are all factors that affect the decision.

This chapter provides guidance intended to focus thoughts on how to select the ideal community. The objective is to help optometrists (and students) determine what they desire in terms of livability of a community, assess the practice potential of the area, and decide whether the economy of the area can support the type of practice desired. The answers to these questions constitute the components of a feasibility study (Box 10-1). This chapter helps one to understand the analysis process through the presentation of information

FINDING “VALUE” IN A LOCATION

The assessment of “value” in determining livability will be the most significant issue in deciding where to practice. Is it important that there be local access to hunting, boating, five-star restaurants, live theater, mountain climbing, golf, professional sports, or symphony performances? Would the slower pace of a rural community be preferable? Is it critical to live near

family members? Are the presence of crowds, air pollution, crime, and traffic jams disturbing? If a practitioner loves the community in which they choose to practice, this attitude will be reflected to patients and staff. Similarly, if a practitioner enjoys living in a locale, the practitioner will want to become an integral part of the local society and will contribute more to the community than just optometric care.

Most patients enjoy seeing their doctor participate in local and civic activities. Today, so much information is available, that with an investment of time and effort, a community can be thoroughly evaluated for livability. There are numerous books, magazines and Internet sites that address the livability of communities. For example, *Places Rated Almanac* is a guide to finding the best places to live in the United States. This almanac ranks and compares 337 metropolitan areas for climate, housing, health, crime, transportation, education, the arts, recreation, and economic outlook. A visit to the local chamber of commerce, bookstore, or library or a search on the Internet will provide access to many other references that examine livability factors of communities. If an optometrist has selected a particular state, information should be sought that has been published specific to that state. For example, if an optometrist is interested in California, it would be helpful to review the book *California, Where to Live and Work*. This book provides essential information on topics such as affordable housing, ratings of schools, climate, cultural information, and fastest-growing job areas. A letter to the local Chamber of Commerce requesting information regarding livability is usually answered with many pamphlets, fliers, and general information regarding the benefits of living and working in the community. A sample letter to a Chamber of Commerce is easy to write and requires little time (Figure 10-1). The address for a particular Chamber of Commerce can be found in the *World Wide Chamber of Commerce Directory*. Optometrists should be cautious about the literature that is received, however, since each Chamber of Commerce is in the business of promoting its community. The advertising received may be biased.

BOX 10-1

Components of a Feasibility Study

A feasibility study of an area should do the following:

- Identify a target patient base for the area and determine how best to serve it.
- Recognize current and potential competition in the area's eye care market.
- Assess the financial risks involved in pursuing the objective of establishing a practice.
- Establish the financial resources needed to begin the practice.
- Determine whether the practice can differentiate itself from other practices in the area, based on available resources and capabilities.

One of the first things an optometrist should do is complete the Future Plans Exercise in Appendix B in Chapter 2. The information gathered in this exercise can help determine what resources a community must have for an individual to reach his or her personal goals. Knowing if these resources must be within 15 minutes or 2 hours of where you live will limit what communities to search for practice opportunities. (Another exercise to help limit the communities to evaluate can be found later in this chapter in Figure 10-5.)

The main reason most choose a community, however, is family. Whether you want to stay close to family or live as far from family as possible, you may wish to consider family first. How close to your family do you wish to be? How close to your in-laws?

Once the decision has been narrowed to 3 to 6 communities, it is highly advisable to plan a trip to each community. These trips inevitably will include communities that appeared great on paper but that may not accommodate the optometrist's priorities. On a first visit to a community, an initial impression of the city and area will be formed. If a poor first impression is obtained, the optometrist should continue on to the next community. The optometrist should plan to spend at least one full day in communities that give a positive first impression.

Figure 10-2 provides a guideline to assist in the proper assessment of a community. The optometrist should begin by thinking about what is valued in a community. The form should be filled in as directed with an "H," "M," or "L" to indicate whether the item is of high, moderate, or low importance. The exercise helps determine what is a priority for an optometrist in a community. The "high importance" elements should be used as a reference and guide when analyzing communities. A spouse or other significant advisor also should perform this exercise, so that all persons affected by the decision can analyze and discuss answers with one another.

ASSESSING THE PAST AND PRESENT ECONOMIC PICTURES OF A COMMUNITY

When most new businesses begin (or if a business expands), an economic study is performed to determine whether the community can support the business. For example, if McDonalds or Pizza Hut decided to place a restaurant in a city, the area involved would be critically and analytically studied with respect to population, employment statistics, retail sales, and many other factors. An optometrist's practice plan likewise should include an economic study to help ensure that the community can support another practice.

To perform such an evaluation, a market study needs to be performed. Information must be collected regarding population, growth rate, new building permits, per capita income, median household income, eye care providers, and ethnic and age analyses (Figure 10-3). A thorough comparison of communities regarding demographic and economic characteristics will be of great assistance in selecting a practice location. Economic characteristics include factors such as population changes, number of households, educational attainment, income and poverty, civilian labor force, housing units, new building permits, and municipal financial revenues and expenditures. An excellent source of information for statistics related to an area's economy can be found in the *Rand McNally Commercial Atlas and Marketing Guide*. The atlas is one of the best resources for economic data, population demographics and estimates, and city ratings.

Chamber of Commerce
Main Street
Anytown, CA

To Whom it May Concern:

Would you please send me information about _____? I am interested in the economic profile, housing, weather, education, and recreation. Helpful information would include major employers, population statistics for 1990 and 2000, ethnic breakdown and income levels (per capita, median household).

I would also like information about the current eye care providers in your city. If possible, please send me a photocopy of the yellow pages that list optometrists, ophthalmologists, and opticians for the area.

Thank you very much for your help. If you have any questions, please let me know.

FIGURE 10-1 Sample letter to a Chamber of Commerce requesting information about a community's economy, livability, and optometric practice potential.

WHAT YOU WANT A COMMUNITY TO OFFER	
DIRECTIONS: For each item below, think about its relative importance or value to you. Place an (H) for high importance, (M) for moderate importance, or (L) for low importance next to each item.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Clean water	<input type="checkbox"/> Small chance of radon gas
<input type="checkbox"/> Low crime rate	<input type="checkbox"/> Commuting time
<input type="checkbox"/> Clean air	<input type="checkbox"/> Low unemployment rate
<input type="checkbox"/> Many doctors	<input type="checkbox"/> Local amusements
<input type="checkbox"/> Availability of hospitals	<input type="checkbox"/> Proximity to a big airport
<input type="checkbox"/> Strong state government	<input type="checkbox"/> Near places of worship
<input type="checkbox"/> Cost of medical care	<input type="checkbox"/> National forests or parks
<input type="checkbox"/> Low income taxes	<input type="checkbox"/> Chance of natural disasters
<input type="checkbox"/> Low property taxes	<input type="checkbox"/> Sunny weather
<input type="checkbox"/> Housing appreciation	<input type="checkbox"/> Close to relatives
<input type="checkbox"/> Recession insulation	<input type="checkbox"/> Quality restaurants
<input type="checkbox"/> Inexpensive cost of living	<input type="checkbox"/> Near a big city
<input type="checkbox"/> Strong local income growth	<input type="checkbox"/> Low housing prices
<input type="checkbox"/> Future job growth	<input type="checkbox"/> Public transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> Low sales tax	<input type="checkbox"/> Museums nearby
<input type="checkbox"/> Cheap car insurance	<input type="checkbox"/> Major league sports teams
<input type="checkbox"/> Good public schools	<input type="checkbox"/> Local symphony orchestras
<input type="checkbox"/> Conservationists' rating	<input type="checkbox"/> Major zoos or aquariums
<input type="checkbox"/> Civic involvement	<input type="checkbox"/> Amtrak service
<input type="checkbox"/> Near lakes, oceans	<input type="checkbox"/> Skiing close by
<input type="checkbox"/> Close to colleges	<input type="checkbox"/> Minor-league sport teams
<input type="checkbox"/> Potential state tax rise	<input type="checkbox"/> Near golf courses

FIGURE 10-2 Rating scale to determine the personal "value" of a community.

Date _____					
Market analysis for _____					
City population 1990 _____	2000 _____				
County population 1990 _____	2000 _____				
City population forecast for 2000 _____					
City growth rate _____ %;	County growth rate _____ %				
New building permits _____					

Per capita income _____	Median household income _____				
Persons in poverty _____	Total households _____				

Three major employers:					
1. _____	Employing _____				
2. _____	Employing _____				
3. _____	Employing _____				
Unemployment rate: _____					

Optometrists in city _____	Ophthalmologists in city _____				
Opticians in city _____	Optical chains in city _____				

Ethnic analysis:	Asian/Pac. Island _____ Black _____				
Amer. Indian _____	Hispanic _____ Spanish origin _____				
White _____					
Age analysis	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Under 5 _____</td> <td>6-17 _____</td> </tr> <tr> <td>18-64 _____</td> <td>>64 _____</td> </tr> </table>	Under 5 _____	6-17 _____	18-64 _____	>64 _____
Under 5 _____	6-17 _____				
18-64 _____	>64 _____				

FIGURE 10-3 Research form for information collected during a feasibility study.

The atlas is an excellent reference for statistics and interpretation of business data. It includes many categories, including the following:

- Buying power index
- Drug store sales
- Effective buying income
- Estimated population
- Food store sales
- Per capita income
- Shopping goods sales
- Zip code sectional areas

Another source of information is the *Census Catalog and Guide*. This book, published by the US Department of Commerce's Bureau of the Census, is a resource for reports, computer tapes, maps, microfiche, online access, and floppy disks. Information is available on business, construction, housing, manufacturing, population, transportation, and related subjects.

If new major national stores have recently moved into an area, it is likely that they have conducted significant economic studies. One predominant new business can greatly impact a community's population, tax base, housing, and business climate. Conversely, the loss of a vital business can have a deleterious effect on a community.

DETERMINING THE OPTOMETRIC PRACTICE POTENTIAL FOR AN AREA

One key aspect of the study of an area is to determine whether there is a need for additional optometrists. Opening a practice in an area highly saturated with eye care providers may lead to slow practice growth and development. Table 10-1 provides a current evaluation of the distribution of optometrists throughout the US, including areas that are saturated and areas that need additional optometrists. A thorough study of an area's

TABLE 10-1

Ratio of ODs to Population in the United States by Area and State			
Area and State	Licensed Optometrists Per 100,000 Persons	Area and State	Licensed Optometrists Per 100,000 Persons
Northeast	12.2	Maryland	9.0
New England	14.6	North Carolina	10.5
Connecticut	12.9	South Carolina	9.2
Maine	15.1	Virginia	11.7
Massachusetts	15.9	West Virginia	12.3
New Hampshire	12.8	East South Central	11.4
Rhode Island	16.2	Alabama	10.2
Vermont	11.6	Kentucky	11.4
Mid-Atlantic	11.3	Mississippi	8.3
New Jersey	11.8	Tennessee	14.0
New York	9.5	West South Central	10.2
Pennsylvania	13.8	Arkansas	12.1
Midwest	13.1	Louisiana	8.1
East North Central	12.7	Oklahoma	16.1
Illinois	13.7	Texas	9.3
Indiana	14.3	West	13.1
Michigan	10.7	Mountain	12.4
Ohio	12.8	Arizona	9.8
Wisconsin	12.6	Colorado	14.5
West North Central	13.8	Idaho	15.2
Iowa	14.3	Montana	20.2
Kansas	15.5	Nevada	9.6
Minnesota	11.4	New Mexico	12.5
Missouri	12.4	Utah	9.9
Nebraska	15.4	Wyoming	17.6
North Dakota	24.8	Pacific	13.4
South Dakota	19.0	Alaska	13.8
South	10.1	California	13.0
South Atlantic	10.5	Hawaii	17.5
Delaware	8.9	Oregon	15.6
District of Columbia	12.6	Washington	13.5
Florida	11.4	US TOTAL	12.0
Georgia	9.3		

From American Optometric Association: *Project Hope: National Census of Optometrists*. St. Louis, 1997.

current eye care providers, the types of services provided, and the vision care needs of the population will enable an optometrist to make an intelligent assessment. Key questions to ask during this assessment include the following:

- Can the community support another eye care provider?
- Does the community makeup support practice goals?
- What are the referral patterns of professionals in the area?
- Does state law allow adequate use of therapeutic pharmaceutical agents?

To find answers to these questions, an optometrist needs to analyze the practice potential of a community. A key consideration is the optometrist-to-population ratio in a community. These ratios serve as guidelines to estimate the economic viability of an area. When individual communities are studied, it may be found that a community with 10,000 people has 5 optometrists. However, the community may be able to support an additional optometrist who offers a particular specialty. Furthermore, the community may have a true drawing population of 80,000 people.

Conversely, a community of 48,000 people may have only 1 or 2 eye care providers. The statistics suggest that the community could easily support an additional optometrist. However, the community may have a per capita income so low, with so many people below poverty level, that an additional optometrist would have a difficult time supporting a practice.

A *rule of thumb* for optometrist-to-population ratio varies from 1:5,000 to 1:7,000 (see Chapter 8). Optometrist-to-population ratios should be used as a guide only, and too much weight should not be given to these ratios when reaching a decision. If the buying population of the community can be accurately determined, the ratios may be more applicable. If city populations alone are used as a guide, without considering drawing areas, it may be difficult to find a community that needs an optometrist.

How does a researcher find out how many active optometrists are practicing in an area? The best way is to review the Yellow Pages listings. Because of the high cost of Yellow Pages advertising, most optometrists who have retired or relocated will not continue a listing in the Yellow Pages. A copy of the Yellow Pages for a community may be obtained from the local telephone company. It also is important to review the listings of ophthalmologists and opticians. (The Yellow Pages also will be of help when calling for information regarding schools, churches, real estate, shopping areas, and similar community resources.)

The *Blue Book of Optometrists* provides a comprehensive list of optometrists, by city and state, throughout the US, Canada, and Puerto Rico. The Blue Book also lists retired optometrists and optometrists who are in education or research, in active military service, and in health maintenance organizations (HMOs). These optometrists should not be figured into practice potential ratios. A companion reference may be found in the *Red Book for Ophthalmologists*.

A *second rule of thumb* that has been applied throughout the years is to have one optometrist to every three dentists.

The reason for this ratio is that, in most cases, people visit a dentist about three times for every one visit to an optometrist. A *third rule of thumb* suggests that there should be one optometrist for every three to four physicians in a community.

Another fact to explore in relation to practice potential is the vision care needs of the population. It should be determined whether the community primarily consists of elderly patients, who would require treatment for pathologic conditions and low-vision services, or of a young adult population, with children who would require contact lens and pediatric services. A community profile that analyzes age categories will provide helpful information regarding the vision care needs of the population. The local Chamber of Commerce usually has census information available that lists age, sex, income, and ethnic categories. The same information can be retrieved online from <http://www.city-data.com>.

Practice potential information can be obtained through local optical laboratories. Laboratory representatives cover particular geographic areas and can serve as excellent sources of information for practice opportunities. Many laboratories have toll-free telephone numbers.

Opportunities can be found through state and national placement efforts. The membership services department of the American Optometric Association (AOA) can be contacted for placement information. The AOA Optometry's Career Center is a computerized service established to help AOA member doctors of optometry and fourth-year optometry student members find mutually satisfying practice opportunities. This service provides a national listing of optometrists seeking employees, partners, and purchasers. In addition, many optometry schools and state optometric associations offer placement services.

When a selected community is visited, it is important to try to talk to as many professionals as possible about the need for optometric services, the economy of the area, and its livability. It also is useful to talk with other health care providers (e.g., school nurses, pharmacists, and physicians) about the community.

When assessing a community, local optometrists should be contacted by mail or telephone regarding potential practice opportunities. A well-written letter expressing interest in the community and asking about practice opportunities may be favorably received by an optometrist looking for an associate or potential buyer. Office visits to optometrists are usually well worth the effort; an associateship, partnership, or purchase option may develop from the encounter.

LOCATING AN OFFICE

Once a community has been chosen, the next step is to determine the location of the office. Of course, if a practice is being purchased, the location is part of the overall evaluation of the proposed sale. However, for a graduate looking to begin a practice, the location of the office is an important consideration. In fact, it is a key part of achieving financial success.

The same sources that were consulted when deciding on a community can be used to evaluate potential locations for

a practice. The US Economic Census for an area can be found at a city's Chamber of Commerce. City records can provide information of new developments in business and residential areas. Future trends about a community and patterns of population can be obtained from real estate associations, utility companies, public libraries, planning boards, school district administrators, and marketing departments of colleges. These data will be essential in guiding the decision-making process. A beginning optometrist should discuss future plans with representatives from all the foregoing organizations. The *Rand McNally Commercial Atlas and Marketing Guide* should be consulted for demographic information. A personal diary should be kept of important contacts and events during the information-gathering process.

The most important consideration in selecting an office site is visibility. If an office is readily visible to the public, there will be a positive effect on patient flow. In some communities, it may be preferable to locate in a medical complex with other health care providers. In this situation, the presence of patients in the building (and hopefully the referral of some of these patients by other tenants) will assist in building a patient base. In some high-visibility locations, such as malls and shopping areas, the cost of office space is expensive. Financial projections need to be carefully made to ensure that such a location is economically viable.

If an office is to be built or remodeled, a contractor will be needed. Determining the right person to do the job is essential. Discussions should be held with tenants, builders, and developers to obtain answers to the following questions:

- Who are the best commercial builders?
- Why is a particular builder considered to be preferable?
- Has the builder experienced legal difficulties or conflicts with clients?
- How long has the builder been in business?
- Where are some of the builder's offices located?

There should be a consistent pattern of behavior and usually a consensus of opinion about the better individuals in the building industry, especially in smaller communities.

Because practices are often open in the evenings to accommodate the schedules of working families, a well-lighted and safe location may be an important priority. It also is an advantage to be near a major thoroughfare and recognizable buildings, especially when a staff member has to give directions to patients regarding the location of the office. Accessibility is a very important consideration when choosing an office location. Adequate parking is a key part of ensuring accessibility.

In most cases, the selection of an office location will be based on the input received from the business people in the community. In particular, dentists seem to understand the economics and business aspects of their profession and community. Initially, the new optometrist has to rely on and trust the opinions of others. If adequate effort has been placed on the collection of information from knowledgeable sources, the choice of location will be a good one.

A suggestion for helping evaluate where to start a new practice is to get a good small-scale map of the area. Buy a supply of colored pins or pens. Sit down with the map and indicate

the locations of optometrists in one color, ophthalmologists in another color, and possible referral sources in a third color. You may be surprised to find a large density of referral points without an eye doctor.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

To begin the process of determining a practice location, practice goals must be established. To evaluate potential practice locations, information should be requested from different communities. A determination of what is valued in a community should be made. A feasibility analysis should be completed for each community that is being considered. The most promising communities should then be rated for practice potential, economics, and livability in Community Analysis Index (see Figure 10-9).

In order to decide what practice is right for you, you must go through certain steps. These steps include setting personal and professional goals, identifying a community that has the resources necessary to meet your goals and evaluating practice opportunities within the community. The following sequence of exercises will assist you in recognizing what practice situation is best for you. Fill in the blanks in the charts and exercises and what is best for you will materialize.

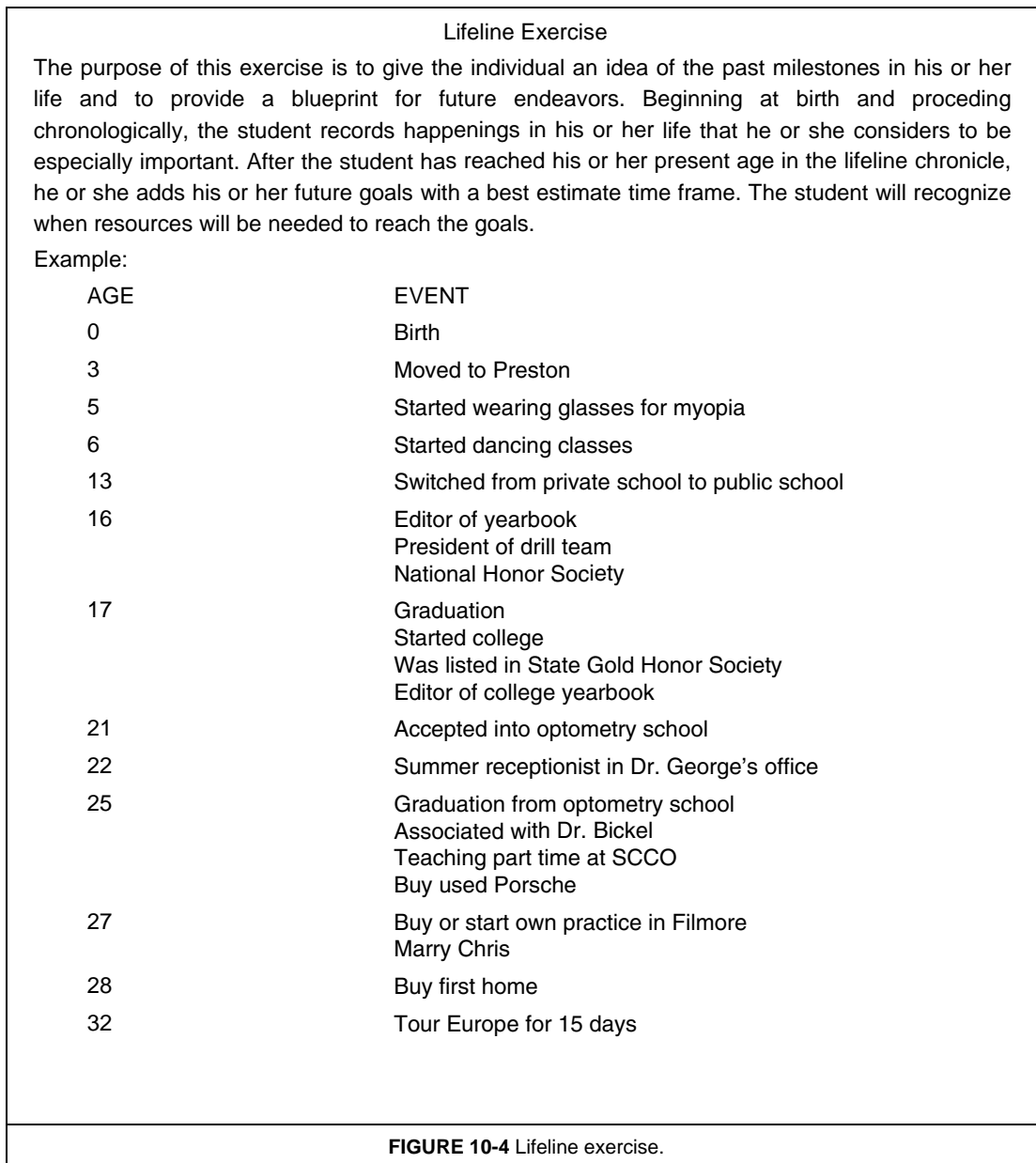
WHAT DO YOU WANT?

To help you identify what you want, complete the future plans exercise in Appendix B in Chapter 2. Write down what you want from your personal life. Then place these plans on a timeline by completing the lifeline exercise in Figure 10-4. Completion of this exercise allows you to recognize what you have done in the past and gives you an idea of when you will be required to have the resources of time and money to reach your future goals.

Do you know all your options for your professional life? Complete the professional goals survey in Appendix A in Chapter 2. You may be surprised at all the choices available to you.

Planning your future can remind you why it was that you entered optometry school. You have completed your optometric education and are now ready to live the future you have been preparing yourself for. Outlining your professional and personal goals will help you recognize what type of community can best fit your needs. For example, if your dream is a large group practice, you will probably need a highly populated community. If you desire to be part of a large eye clinic that provides complete optometric, ophthalmologic, and optical care you will probably need to live in an urban area. Of course, any plan to teach in an optometry school limits you to 19 areas within the US.

Specialization in sports vision requires a nearby sports facility and professional team. Interest in traumatic brain injuries requires a neurologic rehabilitation facility. A desire to serve the profession by influencing politics may require living near a state capitol. Participation in the affairs of organizations within optometry is best achieved by living near the



city within which the headquarters resides. For example, the Optometric Extension Program (OEP) is located in Santa Ana, California, and the AOA is in St. Louis, Missouri. Public speaking, writing for a newspaper, being a resource for a newspaper, or serving on a school board is often easier achieved by living in a small town. Sometimes the choice is being a big fish in a small pond vs. being a small fish in a big pond. It is a choice each of us is lucky to be able to make. Which is best for you? Completion of your resume will give you an impression of whether you have the background to reach your goals or whether you require more education and experience.

WHICH IS THE IDEAL COMMUNITY?

The ideal community is one that includes your personal preferences and has the resources to allow you to reach your goals. Is the glamour of the bright lights and excitement offered

by the big city preferable over the peace and tranquility of a sunset over a ranch in the countryside? Is it more comfortable being able to move about unrecognized in a large town of millions, or do you prefer a small town where everyone knows everyone and what they do on Friday night? Is the climate important to you? Do you hate the heat or hate the cold? Is the silence of the desert more appealing than the roar of the ocean or rush of water striking the rocks in a river? Perhaps your great thrill in life is playing in a badminton league or going on a fox hunt. I recall a graduate whose passion was badminton. Did you know there is a badminton league in Manhattan Beach, California? He knew what community he had to live in! Many of us like to travel. How close does an international airport have to be to be comfortable? The cost of traveling is much lower from cities with hubs of major airlines. Of course, bad weather can completely close airports at the exact time

you plan to travel. How many flights are available from Shelby, Montana vs. Atlanta, Georgia?

Often the deciding factor in where we wish to live may be one of religion. Spiritual life is the primary motivation for many people. Are there others of your faith in the community you wish to live in? Or perhaps you feel more comfortable with a particular ethnic group.

Although there may be many resources required by your future plans, the main determinant of where to live is often presented by your family. Sometimes this means living as far from them as possible. But usually it means living within a practical distance. Imagine what your goals may be if you only have 6 months left to live. All of a sudden our goals change from *things* to *people*. In the end, it is often our parents, brothers and sisters, and friends who are most important to us. How close do you need to be to your parents? Your spouse's family? For some of us living next door is desirable. This requirement may narrow down your list of communities quickly.

Other key resources that may limit what part of the country you wish to practice in include an optometry school, university, community college, airport, and specific climate. Complete the ideal community survey in Figure 10-5 to determine what your needs are and how far away they should be. Then look for communities that will best fill those criteria.

COMMUNITY ANALYSIS

Use the community analysis form (Figure 10-6) to help you recognize what opportunities exist and quantify how desirable a community is for you. Completing this form will give you an idea as to whether there are enough patients in a particular niche for you to see. For example, if you want to offer vision therapy (VT), you will require a large number of children in the community. Are other doctors seeing the children now? Completing the community activities checklist in Figure 10-7 will provide you with possible community groups you may

IDEAL COMMUNITY SURVEY	
<i>Below, circle the choices that will provide the resources to fulfill your future needs.</i>	
LIFESTYLE	Rural Suburban Urban
POPULATION	<10,000 25,000-50,000 >100,000
CLIMATE	Mountains, desert, beach, lakes, valleys, tropical
EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES	Community college, university, optometry school
CULTURAL FACILITIES	Museums, art galleries, community theater, sports arena, stadium, opera house, auditoriums, shopping malls
SERVICE CLUBS	Kiwanis, Lions, Jaycees, Rotary, Masons, Elks, Chamber of Commerce, Junior League, American Legion, YMCA, YWCA, Moose Lodge
SPORTS	Tennis club, golf club, polo field, yacht marina, hunting club, bowling alley, gymnasium, swimming pool, ski resort, racquetball club, martial arts, auto racing, horse trails, badminton club, roller skating rink, ice skating rink, hockey, soccer field, baseball league, basketball league
TRANSPORTATION	Local airport, international airport, freeways, train station, bus station, subways, harbors
SOCIAL CLUBS	Lawn bowling, tour, women's, nudist, bridge, chess, cards, doll, sewing, knitting, singing, dancing, RV, train collectors, coin collectors, stamp collectors, other
RELIGION	_____
ETHNIC GROUP	_____
IN SUMMARY , my ideal community must have _____	
_____ within 30 miles and	
_____ within 60 miles.	
Three communities that have these resources are:	
1)	_____
2)	_____
3)	_____

FIGURE 10-5 Ideal community survey.

COMMUNITY ANALYSIS

The purpose of this community assessment is to identify and organize certain facts about your practice community. From it you'll be able to get a realistic picture of the potential of your community for patients. The following sources may be used to get the information:

1. Local library
2. Chamber of Commerce
3. City, town, and county planners (offices or committees)
4. Superintendent of schools
5. Social agencies
6. Local telephone books

Estimated population		Number of families	
Percentage of age group mix:		Number of households	
Infants (birth-4)		Cost of housing (range)	
School-aged children		Home ownership	
Young adults		Rental	
Adults (26-40)		% of homeowners	
Middle aged (41-60)		Type of transportation available	
Older adults (61>)			
Approximate annual income			
% of ethnic/racial mix		Number of office complexes	
		Number of businesses	
		Number of industries	
		Types of industries	

FIGURE 10-6 Community analysis.

want to contribute to and meet possible referral sources for your practice. A review of the referral agency sources (Figure 10-8) will give you an idea of possible organizations that may provide you with a large number of patients.

Take your data and summarize it in the community analysis index (Figure 10-9) and complete the community comparison profile (Figure 10-10) to recognize which communities seem to work out better for you.

Ask your instructors, mentors, and other doctors what finally influenced them on choosing where to live and how to practice. By talking with others, you will begin to be able to limit the area best suited to fulfill your goals. Of course, major criteria for most would be the ability to earn a living or practice the way desired.

As you work through this process and fill in the blanks, it will become more and more obvious which community is best for you from a livability standpoint and a “make-a-living” viewpoint.

PROFILE OF EYE CARE PROFESSIONALS IN THE COMMUNITY

Having established your needs and narrowed down the number of communities that can fulfill your needs, you must next consider which community is best financially in which to begin your practice. Complete a profile of the doctors in the community. This profile will assist you in deciding what opportunities are available: employee, partnership, buy out, or opening a new practice. Complete the profile for each community you are considering using (Figure 10-11).

ASSESSMENT OF OTHER PROVIDERS

Once you have settled on a practice situation, you may wish to do an in-depth analysis of the competition (Figure 10-12). Use this data to complete the competition comparison in Figure 10-13 to enable you to recognize how to position your

Number of persons employed _____	Number of senior citizen housing _____
Number unemployed _____	Number of nursing homes _____
Major employers _____	Hospitals, medical centers, clinics _____
Types of work	Names of community leaders
Retail sales _____	_____
Professional/technical _____	_____
Computer _____	_____
Heavy manufacturing _____	_____
Light industrial _____	_____
Clerical _____	_____
Government _____	Names of social leaders
Homemaking _____	_____
Education _____	_____
Self-employed _____	_____
Executive/management _____	_____
Others (specify) _____	_____
Estimated school enrollments _____	_____
Preschool _____	_____
Elementary (K-6) _____	Projected changes
Middle school (7-9) _____	Residential _____
High school (10-12) _____	Business _____
Trade school _____	Industrial _____
College/university _____	School _____

FIGURE 10-6—cont'd

practice to compete effectively. You will be able to compete by being different. Be different in a positive way for your patient population.

CONCLUSION

Finding the ideal community in which to practice is an exciting yet demanding endeavor. Planning, travel, and analysis are necessary. To find the time needed to perform an adequate assessment, the process should begin early in optometry school. School holidays and summer vacations are the ideal times to

plan community and practice visits. The earlier the process can be initiated, the better the assessment that can be performed and hopefully, the better the outcome that can be realized.

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COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES CHECKLIST				
<p>This checklist lists several common community organizations. Identify those to which you belong by checking the "member" column. Check the "active" column if you actively participate in the organization's activities or are a committee member or officer. Check whether the organization is primarily in your practice community or your home. List any others in the space provided.</p>				
Organization	Member	Active	Near practice	Near home
Church				
Temple				
Religious organization				
Chamber of Commerce				
Rotary				
Kiwanis				
Elks				
Odd Fellows				
Shriners, Masons				
School related: PTA, Boosters, athletic, etc				
Fraternity or sorority				
College alumni				
YMCA or YWCA				
Women's club				
Newcomer's club				
Country club				
Athletic club				
Business or professional club				
Optometry society, association				
Health/fitness club				
VFW, American legion				
Historical society				
Lions Club				
Optimists				
Altrusa				
Scout groups				
Toastmasters				
League of Women Voters				
Elected or appointed board (park, library, school)				
Political office				
Other (specify)				
Other				
Other				

FIGURE 10-7 Community activities checklist.

REFERRAL AGENCY SOURCES		
Following is a list of possible health care agencies that might refer patients to you. Check the ones that exist in your community and those that currently refer patients to you. Add to the list in the spaces provided.		
Agency	Exists	Refers
Hospital		
Physician group		
School nurse		
Nursing home		
HMO		
Older adult center		
YMCA/YWCA		
Agency for the multiple handicapped		
Commission for the Blind		
Dept. of children and family services		
Children's group home		
Other county agency		
Other city agency		
Other state agency		
Urgent care center		
Senior citizen center		
Other (specify)		

FIGURE 10-8 Referral agency sources.

COMMUNITY ANALYSIS					
Community	1	2	3	4	5
PRACTICE POTENTIAL INDEX					
OD/population ratio	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vision care needs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Types of practices	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Attitude of professionals in the community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Number of physicians	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Opinions of optical labs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TOTAL					
ECONOMIC INDEX					
Employment statistics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Retail sales	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Population growth rate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Community buying power	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Amount of new building	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Amount of new home building	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rate of bank deposit	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Business starts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TOTAL					
LIVABILITY INDEX					
Housing and neighborhood	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Schools	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Churches	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cultural and recreational	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Shopping areas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Community organizations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Climate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Your impression of the area	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TOTAL					
GRAND TOTAL					
INSTRUCTIONS: Use a scale of 1 point for the lowest value to 5 points for the highest value for each of the factors listed above. When completed, the total points for each index can be added together to determine the most desirable community.					

FIGURE 10-9 Community analysis index.

PROFILE OF EYE CARE PROFESSIONALS IN THE COMMUNITY							
References to obtain information for the profiles include <i>The Blue Book of Optometrists</i> , <i>The Red Book of Ophthalmologists</i> , <i>The AOA Directory</i> , local and county telephone books, optometry school alumni directories, sales representatives, the eye care professionals themselves, community members, fellow eye care professionals, patients, and staff.							
Name and Address	Practice Potential index	Age of eye care professional	Office Square footage	Number of years in town	Number and type of staff	Number of days in office	Competitive advantage (notes)

FIGURE 10-11 Profile of eye care professionals in the community.

ASSESSMENT OF OTHER PROVIDERS	
<p>Select two or three service providers that you consider to be your major competitors and complete the Service Provider Data Form below for each of them. A good understanding of what the other providers are doing is one of the best tools you have for evaluating and planning your practice enhancement strategies. There are several sources that you can use to obtain this information:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Your own knowledge, experience, and impressions 2. Feedback from your patients who have switched to your practice 3. Professional contacts with other service providers 4. Sales representatives 	
SERVICE PROVIDER DATA FORM	
Name of provider _____	Date _____
Address and telephone _____ _____	
Major patient groups: _____ _____	
Directly competing services: _____ _____	
New services being developed: _____	
Public image and positioning with patients: _____ _____	
Community or public service group affiliations: _____ _____	
Major strengths: _____ _____	
Major weaknesses: _____ _____	
How does this provider inform potential patients about his/her services? (Marketing tactics) _____ _____ _____	
What's different about your practice and this provider's practice? How can you best exploit the difference? _____ _____	

FIGURE 10-12 In-depth analysis of the competition.

COMPETITION COMPARISON							
References to obtain information for the profiles include <i>The Blue Book of Optometrists</i> , <i>The Red Book of Ophthalmologists</i> , <i>The AOA Directory</i> , local and county telephone books, optometry school alumni directories, sales representatives, the eye care professionals themselves, community members, fellow eye care professionals, patients, and staff.							
Name and Address	Proximity	Age of eye care professional	Office Square footage	Number of years in town	Number and type of staff	Number of days in office	Competitive advantage (notes)

FIGURE 10-13 Competition comparison.

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