A Novartis Company

The Customer Journey

Touchpoint **six:** The eye examination and explanation of results

one
two
three
four
five
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seven
eight
nine
ten
eleven

Touchpoint **six:** The eye examination and explanation or results

Touchpoint six

This is the stage of the customer journey that is feared most by many patients. In fact some have a greater fear of having an eye examination than visiting the dentist. Whilst this may seem irrational to most people who work in an optical practice, there is a need to understand the main reasons behind this thinking to enable a positive approach to be taken. For some the fear is due to being in a darkened room with a stranger, for others it is the worry about whether they will provide the correct answers to the Optometrist and risk ending up with a pair of spectacles they cannot see with. To allay these fears and ensure all patients leave the consulting room feeling they have had a positive experience, the Optometrist must be more than just a good clinician. Unfortunately, very little time is devoted to communication skills and body language training in current optometry courses. Equally, all members of the practice team should have an understanding about what happens during an eye examination in your practice. This will ensure all staff have the knowledge to reassure nervous patients before the eye examination.

Compelling fact

Research has shown that the public perceive an eye examination provided by a less clinically able Optometrist with good communication skills, to be better than one from an excellent clinician who communicates poorly

Initial greeting

Do greet patients using their name and introduce yourself. Offer them a seat in the consulting room and let them know where they should put their coat and handbag (when appropriate).

Put the patient at ease

The first stages should include some general conversation to help build a rapport. This general conversation should be initiated by the use of open questions about anything other than why they have visited the practice today. With nervous patients this stage will inevitably take a little longer than those who appear to be more confident.

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Discussion of history and symptoms

When a rapport has been built, more specific questions can be asked. If a lifestyle questionnaire has been completed, questions should be asked to elicit more information. These specific questions should still be open to encourage more detailed answers. Alternatively, a straightforward question could be asked, such as: *'What was the reason for your appointment with us today?'*. This can be followed with questions about their general health, whether they are taking any medication and if they have any problems with their vision. This is likely to be followed by further questions regarding any symptoms, as well as family history of conditions relating to the eye and vision. Whenever possible these questions should be open to avoid 'yes' or 'no' answers.

During these first stages it is important that the Optometrist employs active listening skills (see touchpoint 3). When asking a question the Optometrist should make eye contact with the patient until they begin to answer. This will encourage them to feel that the Optometrist is genuinely interested in them, as an individual. If adding information to a record card or using a computer keyboard, care must be taken by the Optometrist not to turn their shoulder or back to the patient. This risks undoing the good rapport that was built during the early stages of the consultation. The use of a clipboard on the Optometrist's knee is better, than turning to use a desk, when writing on a record card.
If a computer is used, the keyboard should be situated on a small shelf adjacent to the patient's chair to avoid the Optometrist turning away.

The eye examination

The routine of tests undertaken during an eye examination will be the choice of the Optometrist concerned. However, to enhance the patient's perception of the whole eye examination process it is best to introduce each test with a short explanation regarding what it is for. This can be followed by a description of the outcome. If this is a new approach to the Optometrist's routine it may seem a little onerous at first. Although, in time it will become second nature and well worth the extra effort for the improved levels of patient satisfaction it will deliver. It is also useful to reassure patients about the answers they give during the subjective parts of the sight test, because the outcome will be confirmed objectively later on, during retinoscopy.

'No change' prescriptions

If there is very little change in the prescription since a previous eye examination, why not say that the prescription is stable, rather than using the expression 'no change'. This will reduce the number who feel that they are not allowed to have a new pair of spectacles because there is 'no change' in their prescription.

Additional services and tests

To help build patient loyalty when additional tests are performed, such as, tonometry, field screening and retinal/fundus photography, it is good to tell patients that today's results will provide a baseline measurement against which comparisons can be made during future visits and any changes will be monitored. In addition, this will encourage the patient to understand that an eye examination is more than just a refraction, to determine a prescription.

Making recommendations

If experienced, knowledgeable dispensing staff support the Optometrist, it is wise to introduce spectacle lens and frame options in the consulting room, generically. For example, the new presbyope can be introduced to varifocal lenses as an option. However, it is best to keep all options open, for the Dispenser to help them make the final decision. It is even worth saying *'This is just one of the options and our Dispenser, [name] will be the best person to help you make your final decision.'* This way the Dispenser will still have the opportunity to discuss all the dispensing options with the patient, without feeling that the decision is a foregone conclusion.

Contact lenses should be mentioned whenever appropriate.

Compelling fact

48% of all spectacle wearers would consider contact lenses if recommended by their Practitioner.

There are the added benefits of increased patient loyalty and practice profitability from those who wear spectacles and contact lenses. For patients with larger prescriptions, who may have difficulty seeing what they look like when trying new frames, why not offer to fit them with a pair of trial contact lenses before handing them over to the Dispenser.

Finally…

Before leaving the consulting room and introducing the patient to the Dispenser, do ask if they have any questions. The answer is likely to be 'no', in the majority of cases, but it will be considered a pleasant gesture nonetheless.

Customer Journey materials

'Contact lens proactive reading test' (ZCJREADTEST)

Action Plan

Ensure the entire practice team are conversant with the main procedures conducted during a routine eye examination and consider ways in which body language and communication in the consulting room can be improved upon.

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