

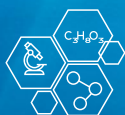


**Topics in
Women's Health:
HOW TO LIVE IT
and COUNSEL IT**

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So Many STARS

THE
Editorial
Pages

The 200+ Theia Award nominations sent in this year show the tremendous depth of leaders, mentors, educators, influencers, innovators and up-and-comers in optometry. Congratulations to this year's nominees and especially to these winners.



Dr. Ahmad

LEADERSHIP ☆ Naheed Ahmad, OD, of Roswell, Georgia. Dr. Ahmad is the current president of the American Association of Corporate Optometrists, formerly known as Energyeyes. ☆ Dori M. Carlson, OD, FFAO, of Park River, North Dakota. Dr. Carlson was the first woman OD to hold the position of president of the American Optometric Association. She is currently pursuing a master's degree in leadership.



Dr. Carlson

☆ Jennifer Smith Zolman, OD, FCOVD, of Charleston, South Carolina. While Dr. Zolman was president of the South Carolina Optometric Physicians Association, she established a Leadership Institute to help cultivate young leaders.



Dr. Zolman

YOUNG OD ☆ Jessilin M. Quint, OD, MBA, FFAO, of Augusta, Maine. Dr. Quint, a 2014 graduate of Indiana University School of Optometry, she now co-owns a three-location practice with 50 employees and seven full-time ODs.



Dr. Quint

INNOVATION ☆ Jennifer Stewart, OD, of Norwalk, Connecticut. Dr. Stewart has opened what is now one of the largest standalone sports and performance vision training centers in the U.S. in addition to being a partner in a large private practice.



Dr. Stewart

INFLUENCER ☆ Joan Ploem Miller, OD, of Hillsboro, Oregon. Dr. Miller started the hugely popular and supportive OD Divas as a Facebook social community for women ODs. It has grown to more than 5,000 members since its start in January 2018.



Dr. Miller



Dr. Cauchi

MENTORING ☆ Caroline Guerrero Cauchi, OD, FIAOMC, of La Mesa, California. Dr. Cauchi is one of the pioneers in orthokeratology and has mentored many ODs in myopia management. She is chair of Fellowship at the International Academy of Orthokeratology and Myopia Control.



Dr. Quinn

EDUCATION ☆ Nicole Quinn, OD, of New England College of Optometry. Dr. Quinn was nominated by her colleagues and former and current students. One nominator wrote that she "is incredibly intelligent and approachable, the combination of which makes a great leader."



Dr. Andrews

INDUSTRY ☆ Michele Andrews, OD, senior director of professional and academic affairs, CooperVision. Dr. Andrews has been key to the CooperVision Best Practices program introduced in 2015. She leads and/or oversees the execution of CooperVision's academic programs and is heavily involved in advocacy. | WIO |

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Amarillo, Texas

WO Marketing DIAMONDS

Nikki Iravani, OD, is always on the lookout for a great marketing tip. She has had her share of marketing successes, from launching the EyeXam app after developing it to marketing an uber high-tech, high-touch office by the same name, EyeXam Silicon Valley in Santa Clara, California. She is always willing to try new ideas.



Dr. Iravani

"I saw the wealth of ideas that *Women In Optometry* has gathered by sharing office design stories, and I know the same principles can apply to marketing ideas," she says.

Dr. Iravani will work with WO to develop or collect and present marketing tips from ODs willing to share which ideas worked. To kick off this WO Marketing Diamonds series, Dr. Iravani shares the strategies she learned the hard way. Coming into private practice from industry, she had never owned a practice before. So she had to learn fast.

Nail the first impression. Don't wait for a second chance. When opening a new practice, plan to celebrate with a "grand

opening event. An existing practice can also benefit from generating buzz from an open house/trunk show and a patient appreciation event to introduce

“Nail the first impression. Don't wait for a second chance.”

new technology or services or some other kind of open house that brings people in. Whether a practice is new or well-established, there are ways to improve or refresh the impression that patients get when they visit its website, call for an appointment or walk through the doors.

Would you like to share a marketing idea? Dr. Iravani would be happy to hear from you. She can be reached via wovoicesonline@gmail.com. | WO |



Go big: Dr. Iravani wanted her grand opening to be memorable.



Visitors to Dr. Iravani's practice had a chance to experience the technology and see the frames.

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Richard Levin, OD, Baltimore, MD, Premier Program practice since 2015



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Percentage of Women in Class of 2023 Rises to 70%

The percentage of women entering North American schools and colleges of optometry this fall has increased to 70 percent, compared to last year's 69 percent. Across all schools, overall enrollment in the class of 2023 is 28 more students than enrolled in the fall of 2018. | [WO](#) |

School	2019 total	# of women	% of women
 Illinois College of Optometry	124	86	69%
 Indiana University School of Optometry	85	63	74%
 Inter American University of Puerto Rico School of Optometry	54	34	63%
 MCPHS University School of Optometry	67	49	73%
 Michigan College of Optometry, Ferris State University	38	28	74%
 Midwestern University Arizona College of Optometry	57	31	54%
 Midwestern University Chicago College of Optometry	61	41	67%
 New England College of Optometry	138	102	74%
 Northeastern State University Oklahoma College of Optometry	28	16	57%
 Nova Southeastern University College of Optometry	107	73	68%
 The Ohio State University College of Optometry	68	41	60%
 Pacific University College of Optometry	94	65	69%
 Salus University Pennsylvania College of Optometry*	155	113	73%
 Southern California College of Optometry at Marshall B. Ketchum University	104	75	72%
 Southern College of Optometry	136	96	71%
 State University of New York College of Optometry	98	70	71%
 University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Optometry	45	27	60%
 University of California, Berkeley, School of Optometry	70	52	74%
 University of Houston College of Optometry	104	68	65%
 University of the Incarnate Word Rosenberg School of Optometry	69	50	72%
 University of Missouri, St. Louis, College of Optometry	46	27	59%
 University of Montreal School of Optometry	45	35	78%
 University of Pikeville-Kentucky College of Optometry	62	47	76%
 University of Waterloo School of Optometry & Vision Science	90	62	69%
 Western University of Health Sciences' College of Optometry	74	54	73%

*PCO Accelerated Scholars Optometry Program (class of 2022)—Total class size: 13; Male: 5, Female: 8 (not included in the count above).

Source: North American schools and colleges of optometry as of September 2019.

TOTAL: 2,019 1,405 70%

Note: These enrollment numbers may or may not include students who are repeating the first year of the program.

For the Le Sisters, **OPTOMETRY** Is the **FAMILY BUSINESS**



Sisters (l-r) Dr. Yen Le and Dr. My Le decided to launch their careers inside Walmart where they are building a family business.

Practicing an hour apart, the sisters see each other as collaborators, not competitors.

For My Le, OD, and Yen Le, OD, FAAO, their inspiration to go into optometry was influenced by their parents and sisters being physicians. The family's shared vision is to make a positive difference in the lives of their patients each and every day.

Dr. Yen Le of Happy Family Eye Care in Mayodan, North Carolina, graduated from the Pennsylvania College of Optometry (now Salus University) in 2010. After graduation, she completed a residency in primary care and ocular disease in 2011 at The Eye Institute at Salus University before earning her fellowship in the American Academy of Optometry. After working in Pennsylvania, Dr. Yen Le was determined that she wanted to practice in her *home sweet home* state of North Carolina. After contacting Walmart about renting space, Dr. Yen Le received a call from **Renee Hinshaw**, a market health and wellness director for Walmart in North Carolina, offering her the opportunity to open her own practice and practice full-scope medical optometry.

Dr. My Le graduated optometry school from Salus University in 2013. She is currently practicing

in Greensboro at Happy Eye Care Center inside a Walmart. Dr. My Le says she feels like she is a part of the Walmart family.

Both of the sisters say that they believe that the key to working in Walmart is to make a big impact in the community. They seek to provide patients with enriching educational and clinical experiences and provide top-quality care—both medical and refractive—in an accessible environment. At each practice, patients can be treated beyond routine eye exams including eye emergencies; foreign body removals; comprehensive eye exams with a heavy focus on diabetes, hypertension, macular degeneration, dry eyes and allergic conjunctivitis; pediatric and binocular vision exams; post-operative care; and specialty contact lens fittings. Both of the Le sisters let their patients know that they can count on them.

While the sisters practice about an hour apart from each other in North Carolina, Dr. My Le notes that neither of them sees the other as competition but rather as collaborators.

INDEPENDENT BUT CONNECTED

While the sisters have some of the same training and certainly the same upbringing, their involvement in the other's practice is limited to some light consultations. According to Dr. Yen Le, "We were trained at the same school so we are both very confident in what we do. We are very independent. If we have questions, we will ask. We are just a phone call away."

POSITIVE, DEDICATED LEADERS

Hinshaw speaks highly of both doctors, acknowledging their commitment to their patients and their willingness to do everything they can to be available for their patients. She calls them both "positive, dedicated leaders, well-known in their stores and communities" and commends their hearts for their patients.

Their top priority is to convey a happy, family environment that

“Visitors had a chance to experience the technology and see the frames.”

they want to pass on to every patient who comes through their respective doors. "It's important to treat patients like family. We want our patients to feel welcome to our practice like it's their second home," says Dr. Yen Le.

"Family is caring. The environment is more home-like, and patients feel more comfortable. Everyone who walks in here should be treated like family," says Dr. My Le.

Indeed, the practices' Yelp reviews rave about how friendly and efficient the staff is, how the doctors explain what's happening and how patients, as one put it, "are treated like royalty."

Both doctors say that they appreciate how Walmart has enabled them to practice independently, just as they appreciate how their family influence has helped—and continues to help them—in their successful businesses. | [WO](#) |

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The Reichert Phoroptor® VRx Digital Refraction System



Dr. Truong

“I can explain how the new prescription might help them while driving at night or in the rain.”

When Nancy Truong, OD, and her husband, Minh Ta, OD, graduated from the Illinois College of Optometry in 2002, they had known their ultimate goal was to one day open their own practice. After years of working for others, all the while gathering ideas for their future practice, in early 2018, their vision came to fruition.

Specs Appeal opened under the premise “to provide the best care possible by using advanced technology and state-of-the-art products, to create a higher level of service from beginning to end.” They selected Decatur, Georgia, outside of Atlanta. “The area is being revitalized with young people and interesting development,” she says. The population boom coincides with new investment in the city, creating potential for their new practice.

SET YOURSELF UP FOR SUCCESS

The location has two exam lanes, so in order to maximize efficiency, the couple chose to add the Reichert Phoroptor® VRx Digital Refraction System to both. Since all the pretest data is transmitted automatically to the Phoroptor VRx, the refractions are much quicker than with a manual phoropter. It allows her to focus her time on discussing ocular health and the specific vision needs of her patients, and the solutions she can prescribe.

Both she and her patients appreciate the quick comparison between their old eyeglasses and the new prescription she is recommending. “I call that the ‘money button,’” she says, because she can toggle between old and new lenses in a way that a traditional manual phoropter cannot. “I can show patients the change very quickly, and I can explain how the new prescription might help them while driving at night or in the rain.” This has resulted in a higher conversion rate in her optical, key to a successful independent optometric practice.

MAKE IT ENJOYABLE

Dr. Truong noticed that the refraction process caused a lot of stress for many patients, and she says that the process is now easier for patients, thanks to the fully customizable Phoroptor VRx. “Some patients try so hard to answer the questions during a refraction ‘correctly.’ They want to give very detailed answers, saying, ‘Well, 1 is more stretched out, but 2 has sharper edges.’ Sometimes it’s easier to have the dots target rather than the letters,” she says, which she can make the default chart when she is doing

Jackson cross cylinder testing.

Phoroptor VRx offers her a variety of settings to choose from, including the option of refracting with a 1.00D change rather than the standard 0.25D step. “For patients with a high prescription or disease, those 0.25D steps just aren’t enough; they don’t see a difference. The 1.00D option helps me get to the end point faster, and avoids patients getting frustrated,” she says. This makes her patients more comfortable and more confident in her abilities as a doctor. And more confidence leads to patient retention.

DIFFERENTIATION POINT

“There is always some art to a refraction,” she says, and with the Phoroptor VRx, she can achieve quick results, impressing her patients who routinely comment on the modern technology. “They often say, ‘My other doctor never had any of this,’ and they walk away with confidence.” Dr. Truong says that the technology does differentiate her from other providers, but the most striking difference lies with her patients who have only done virtual eye tests when ordering eyeglasses online. “These patients now understand that the online test cannot match the accuracy of what happens in our office.” It’s the combination of the in-depth, personalized treatment combined with the high-tech equipment that make their patients come back year after year. |WO|

KEEP THEM COMING BACK

The precision that goes into the eye exam experience can also extend to the optical. As Dr. Nancy Truong finishes her patients’ exam and post-exam discussion, many find that they do want new eyewear. However, some still ask if they can get their pupillary distance (PD) measurement with their prescription, so they can order their eyewear online. “I explain that while we can certainly give it to them, it’s only one part of the measurement,” Dr. Truong says. The PD alone, especially with progressive lenses, will not necessarily ensure a great fit, resulting in eyeglasses that don’t give them the clearest vision possible, she says. Many of her patients don’t think of this when ordering eyeglasses online, and it is her job to educate her patients. “Most of the patients had never thought of it that way. Those with more complex prescriptions are more apt to stay in the office when they hear it explained this way,” she says, which benefits everyone.

The efficiency of the Phoroptor® VRx gives Dr. Truong more time to educate her patients about their vision care, while the high-tech impression it gives her patients results in an impressed clientele who will continue to come back for exams and purchase their eyeglasses at her optical. “We wanted to distinguish ourselves,” she says, and they clearly do. |WO|

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Read more in The Patient Experience under Growth Strategies on womeninoptometry.com.

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We believe everyone deserves to see their best to live their best.



Dr. Barker-Assell rallies the participants at the Inaugural Khaleda Run & Butterfly Release.

Key Business Partner Helps Optometrist Improve Practice and **DRIVE MISSION**

Amanda Barker-Assell, OD, of Denver, North Carolina, says that her profession “has given me the opportunity to be successful in the areas of life that are important to me.” From a young age, she wanted to be in the medical field; optometry offered her a perfect blend for her life goals, which included balancing a private practice, mission work and family. As a member of the Essilor Experts™, Dr. Barker-Assell discusses how partnering with Essilor has helped her improve her practice and provide the best for her patients.



Dr. Barker-Assell

with the latest product technology but also with excellent team training, more advanced technology for patient education surrounding our products, tools to set goals and a dashboard to monitor our key performance indicators. This allows me to run a more effective and efficient business and provide higher-level care and customer service to my patients.”

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Dr. Barker-Assell says that while there are many challenges in the optometric industry, there are also many opportunities. “It feels like a disruptive time in our industry. HIPAA regulations, a plethora of insurance benefits to decipher, the warp speed of internet competition, the development and future of telemedicine and the entrance of private equity to this profession all contribute to a more complex and overwhelming field to navigate. However, there are so many great programs, products, tools, companies and opportunities to take advantage of to maintain a successful and thriving practice,” she says.

Optometry is a wonderful profession for women because it allows so many different models of practice and a variety of roles. “There are few other professions that allow such flexibility over an entire career. Personally, I would love to see more women in the private practice sector. In the past few years, I have had the pleasure of collaborating with more female business owners, and it has been refreshing. Independent optometry is not the easiest business to operate. It takes constant work and energy; however, when doctors take

advantage of partnerships and programs, like Essilor Experts, they receive support, insight and expertise that helps them succeed. It is a powerful combination.”

MISSION-DRIVEN WORK

The heart of her work focuses on mission-driven and humanitarian efforts around vision and literacy. While providing eye care through a mission-related organization in 2008, she and husband, **Mike Assell, OD**, met and adopted their first child, **Khaleda**, who was 8 and suffered from a life-long medical condition that required constant and aggressive medical treatment. On May 8, 2016, Khaleda passed away. “The adoption was an amazing opportunity and a tremendous blessing to us,” she says.

In an effort to honor Khaleda’s life, Dr. Barker-Assell started a nonprofit organization called BlindSight to focus on serving vision and literacy needs domestically and abroad. In May 2019, she and her husband, who continue to focus on mission work, hosted the Inaugural Khaleda Run & Butterfly Release. “With the run proceeds, we are partnering to support vision and literacy needs within our own community, and in January 2020, we hope to set up our first international vision clinic in Belize. We are thrilled to have this opportunity and look forward to many more,” she says.

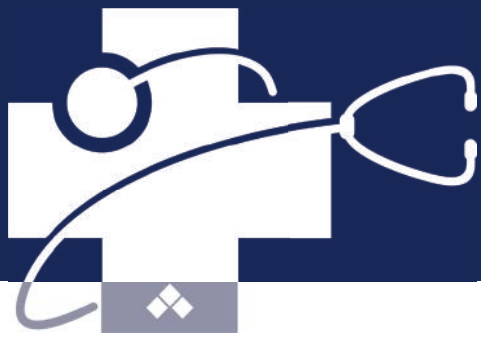
“I love being an optometrist, and I love to serve people in such a meaningful way. I consider it an honor to help protect and restore the most precious sense of sight.” | [WO](#) |

“When doctors take advantage of... Essilor Experts, they receive support, insight and expertise that help them succeed.”

Dr. Barker-Assell says that during her 17-year career, she has seen many exciting changes in the profession, including new and innovative contact lenses; advances in digital technology with regard to lens designs; amazing development in devices used to diagnose, treat and manage ocular diseases; and more opportunities to become involved in practice management with like-minded colleagues. “With the technological advancements in our industry, I feel we practice at a more specialized level and have been able to incorporate subspecialties such as vision therapy, dry eye treatment and specialty contact lenses, all of which help us continue to thrive in the changing world of optometry.”

One of the many programs she finds effective and relevant is Essilor Experts. She is an active member of the advisory board for this program. “I’m thankful to have great programs like this one. Essilor Experts has provided our office not only

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Read more in Ophthalmic Lens Products under Growth Strategies in womeninoptometry.com.



Introducing PECAA's New Association Health Plan

Health Care Benefits at Competitive Rates for Your Practice Employees & Their Families

PECAA, *the Professional Eye Care Associates of America*, has launched PECAAHP, a health care solution designed to help independent eye care practices leverage PECAA's group buying power as part of a larger, combined unit to purchase health care benefits at competitive rates, *regardless of your individual practice size*.

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How a Passion for Helped Build a Thriving Medical Practice

NUTRITION

Macula Mondays bring in visitors who learn more about the connection between nutrition and ocular health

On Macula Mondays, the focus is on eye-healthy foods.



Dr. Marshall

Jessica Marshall, OD, took a chance nine years ago and decided to work inside a LensCrafters. Taking on the sublease meant inheriting a practice that was devoted almost entirely to prescribing eyeglasses and contact lenses, but Dr. Marshall saw the opportunity and knew she could turn it around by putting her training to work and committing to practicing full-scope optometry.

Today, the practice bears little resemblance to what it once was. In fact, Dr. Marshall has doubled her bottom line, thanks to her strong commitment to medical services and a recent focus on age-related macular degeneration (AMD).

THE EARLY DAYS

Dr. Marshall, a former New York City public school teacher, received her optometry degree from the State University of New York College of Optometry and completed internships in ocular disease at Keller Army Hospital, West Point Military and the East New York Medical Center-Brooklyn. Her LensCrafters-based practice, Marshall EyeCare Physicians, is in Holmdel, New Jersey—about a 30-minute drive from the Big Apple.

Long before Dr. Marshall entered optometry school, she had an interest in health and a particular passion for nutrition, which began when she was young and her mother was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. “Because my mom didn’t handle nutrition well, I recognize the barriers to education and how patient personality can impact dietary behavior,” says Dr. Marshall. She continued to

discover more about the connection between nutrition, ocular health and overall health. She became increasingly committed to the cause, which eventually led to exponential practice growth and a well-established presence in the community.

“Many practitioners don’t take the time to talk to their patients about antioxidants and other nutrients, so whether it resonates or not, patients recognize and appreciate the high level of interest and unique care that we offer,” she says.

When patients hear about AMD, the interest level is high. “So many people know someone who lost vision or lost the ability to drive due to AMD, so it touches people even more so than diabetes or glaucoma,” she says.

Although there are numerous risk factors for AMD, patients can control some, such as diet, exercise and smoking, she adds. Dr. Marshall’s goal is to empower patients to do all they can to prevent, reverse or slow AMD progression by modifying these key behaviors.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

The practice organically grew as a result of the emphasis on nutrition and the unique care that Dr. Marshall delivered, but the real tipping point came when she added dark adaptation testing to her list of services and married the concept of early detection to the importance of proper nutrition.

“We started a community outreach program called Macula Monday,” says Dr. Marshall. The practice advertises the quarterly event in the local papers and orders locally made, eye-healthy food, including kale salad,

smoothies, pomegranate juice and any other delicious foods that are high in antioxidants.

Macula Monday is free and open to the entire community with a reservation. “People love free food, and most are unaware of how good healthy foods like kale can taste. We hand out recipes, business cards and invitations to our next event so these prospective patients can also tell their friends about our events.”

The practice limits attendance to 40, and everyone who attends Macula Monday gets a free AdaptDx Rapid Test. “It’s remarkable how many people fail the test and need to come back for a full exam,” says Dr. Marshall. “It makes me rethink all those cases in which I suspect cataract is to blame for night-vision complaints.”

BUSINESS MODEL

Dr. Marshall has chosen to write recommendations for supplements on an Rx pad rather than sell them from the office at this point. “Although I’m prescribing more supplements than ever before, for the time being my emphasis is on detection and education.”

The practice is about a year into its implementation of dark adaptation, and her newly diagnosed AMD patients are doing well and grateful to have been made aware of their disease so they can be proactive. | WO |

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Read more in AMD Diagnostic Technology under Growth Strategies on womeninoptometry.com.

“Many practitioners don’t take the time to talk to their patients about antioxidants and other nutrients.”

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New OPPORTUNITIES Arise With OWNERSHIP SHIFT

Infrastructure and capital backing allow former family-owned practice to accelerate growth



Dr. Roberts

When a long-held family business is sold, it's natural to be sentimental about the way things were, says **Elizabeth Roberts, OD**. She had been an employee in Eye Express, a 12-location group

in Florida that was owned by her brother, two uncles and a fourth partner.

Since the group became part of the MyEyeDr. network in January 2016, Dr. Roberts sees how much less preoccupied and stressed those former owners are. Since they are family, she has a greater appreciation for their peace of mind. "It was a great thing for them. My uncle was in his 70s, and he didn't have a transition plan for his part of the practice," she says.

"It was great for my brother, too, since he worked so hard to make the practice what it was and was able to reap the benefits while he was still young."

She has benefitted as well, she says. Her salary is higher, she achieves more bonuses, and she has been able to take advantage of training that wasn't available to her in the family business. Recently, she took a leadership development course offered by MyEyeDr. that she says was tremendously valuable personally and professionally.

Some aspects of her life also are calmer now. When it was a family-owned business, she worked in any office where she was needed. "I had worked in at least half of the office locations regularly over the years. Since the practices became part of MyEyeDr., I have been able to work exclusively in the South Lakeland office, which is closest to my home," she says.

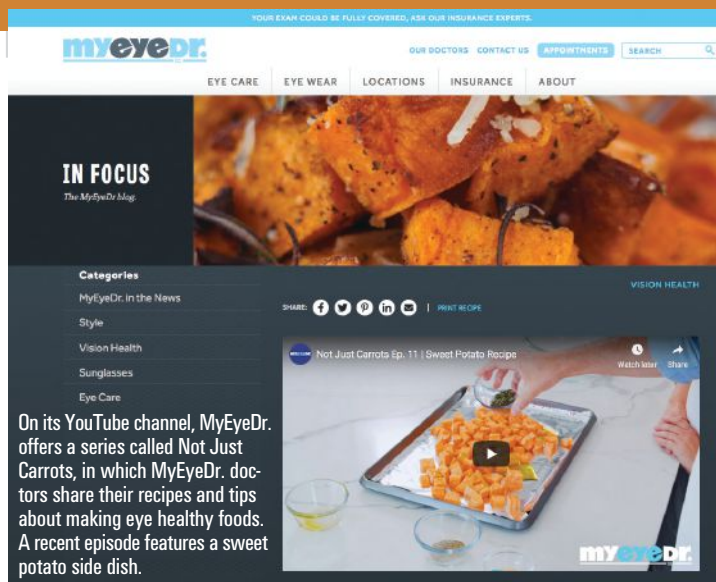
Two familiar aspects of work have not

changed. First, she still works for her older brother, as he is the clinical field director. And there remains a strong standard of care. In fact, access to technology and the repair or replacement of diagnostic equipment like cameras and OCTs helps to enhance our standard of care. "The retinal camera is a great tool to use with our patients, showing them their results when everything is healthy with their eyes or when something on the image raises a concern," she says.

“You have to make patients smile. If you can do that, you’ve made a connection.”

new technologies, products and protocols, a new lesson plan is made available to staff members so that they can remain current. "MyEyeDr. has great infrastructure to get information out to everyone," she says. It results in a more consistent training platform rather than having the training be the responsibility of one or two people in the office when it fits into their schedule.

Dr. Roberts says that the leadership development course that she took has shown her opportunities to expand her leadership based on tools that are available to her now. "I am able to be a more effective manager because I receive metrics that allow me to spot opportunities for me and my staff. I



enjoy that part; I'm very competitive," she says. She'll analyze where the office is doing well and how the staff can be more productive in other areas, all in the pursuit of helping each patient who comes in the door to see better than he or she did beforehand.

"We track office performance and patient interaction within the office. Knowing these numbers doesn't change the way I practice, but it does make me more aware of how I communicate what I'm doing. I might refine my discussion on the benefits of some of the lens features, for example, which in turn makes it easier for the optical sales staff to reinforce that message," she says. And patients benefit from those collaborative efforts.

Ultimately, it's the personal touch in providing eye care that keeps patients coming back year after year, no matter what brand name is on the front of the building. "My uncle told me, 'You have to make patients smile. If you can do that, you've made a connection, and they'll remember that.'" | [WO](#) |

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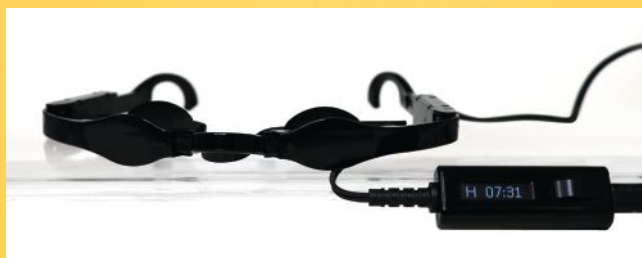
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Finalize Most Multifocal Fits at First FOLLOW-UP



Dr. Heuer

When patients become presbyopic, their quality of life is compromised. Patients find that their old visual solutions no longer work. But it doesn't need to be that way, says **Lisa Heuer, OD**, of Valley Vista Eye Care Optometric Center in Woodland, California. With NaturalVue® Multifocal 1 Day Contact Lenses, she can restore, and even improve, her patients' quality of life. "One of the great things about this lens is that it has been mutually beneficial for patients and my practice, with around 75 percent of prescriptions finalized at the first follow-up. That translates to more time with my exam chair available to serve other patients," she says.

GREAT FOR PATIENTS, GREAT FOR THE PRACTICE

Dr. Heuer began prescribing NaturalVue Multifocal 1 Day Contact Lenses in 2016. She first heard discussion about the lens on the social media site ODs on Facebook, and its distinguishing characteristics were intriguing, she says. Doctors were saying that the single-add, center-distance and extended-depth-of-focus features sounded advantageous for presbyopic patients.

"The other ODs who had tried it said that distance vision was not degraded as it often is with other center-near design lenses. I wanted to learn more," she says. So Dr. Heuer decided there was no better way to refer her patients to this new product than through her own experience. "After completing online training for doctors who wanted a fitting set, I volunteered to test the lenses myself. My prescription is -12.00D, and I loved the lens, so I knew my patients would, too."

PRESBYOPES AS PRACTICE-BUILDERS

Presbyopes represent between a quarter and a third of Dr. Heuer's practice. About 15 percent of those patients are wearing multifocal contact lenses, meaning that only four percent to five percent of her patients are current multifocal contact lens users. That represents a tremendous opportunity. "I start preparing all patients for presbyopic changes as they approach age 40, describing the expected symptoms and the options available to them," she says.

This advance notice serves two key purposes. First, it helps ease patients' worries as these symptoms emerge. "I'd rather my patients calmly think to themselves, 'Oh darn, this is that thing Dr. Heuer told me about,' rather than the panic, thinking, 'Oh my gosh, I lost the ability to read. This happened overnight. I'm going blind.'"

Second, the conversations about emerging presbyopia give her an opportunity to describe ophthalmic and contact lens options that can help. That way, patients enter presbyopia knowing that there are solutions to this new issue that they are facing, and they can start to form an opinion about the solutions that fit their lifestyle needs.

BINOCULAR VISION BENEFITS

"If I inherit someone with monovision contact lenses from another office or the prior owner of my office, I might say: 'Are you ever bothered by your lack

of depth perception with those lenses?' Then I explain how stereopsis is compromised by monovision, but not by multifocal lenses," she says. She might also ask: "Do you feel like your computer is blurry no matter what you do?" That question opens the door to an explanation

“I volunteered to test the lenses myself. My prescription is -12.00D, and I loved the lens.”

that monovision works like a lined bifocal with two distinct distances in focus while all other distances are a bit compromised.

Once patients agree to give multifocal contact lenses a try, "I am careful to set expectations for the adaptation time

needed for their visual system to get used to the lenses," she says.

WORTH THE EFFORT

Fitting multifocal contact lens wearers may take an extra visit or chair time, but it's well worth the effort, says Dr. Heuer. "If we fuss over the contact lens prescription now and get it really dialed in, future years will be much simpler with minor adjustments. Our work will pay off."

She encourages patients to be patient with the process, too, telling them, "I want you to love your contact lenses, not just tolerate them." | [WO](#)

“I start preparing all patients for presbyopic changes as they approach age 40.”

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Read more in Redefining Vision under Growth Strategies on womeninoptometry.com.



Passionate about patient experience?

“MY PATIENTS CAN DEFINITELY TELL I AM.”

Multitasker **Lisa Genovese, OD**, co-owner of **Insight Eye Care's** multiple locations, talks about using technology to efficiently juggle being a full-time optometrist, a full-time entrepreneur, and a full-time parent. By using the most advanced Phoroptor®, **Phoroptor® VRx**, and the pixel-perfect **ClearChart® 4** Digital Acuity System, she's brought balance to her practice and personal life.



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Decisions, Decisions, DECISIONS



Constant demand for decisions can overwhelm a new practitioner



Dr. Richardson

Meg Richardson, OD, began working at a corporate location immediately after her graduation from Pacific University College of Optometry, and it was a good fit. But when her daughters began going to school 30 miles in the opposite direction, she felt like she was being pulled—literally—in another direction.

So it made sense to open her own practice in her hometown of Racine, Wisconsin, especially if that meant her children could spend time with her there when they were not in school. “As a parent, you really want a place where

you can bring your kids and feel comfortable bringing your kids.”

Dr. Richardson was no stranger to the intricacies of a small business, as she had grown up watching her father manage his. Still, watching from across the counter and getting your own business plan in order is a different ballgame. Dr. Richardson found an immense amount of help through her doctor alliance group PECAA, which, in her early days, helped her apply for a small business loan through a local bank and navigate the equipment, frame and other vendor choices that were right for her practice.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

She credits one of the successes of her first year to spending a lot of time in the community. She would volunteer, network and build relationships with local clients. “Those relationships are what help you be known as someone people can trust or look to for leadership,” she says.

However, building relationships was only the first step. Marketing ended up being a huge passion for Dr. Richardson, and her practice put its emphasis in a familiar place: Facebook. She has found a target market among mothers and parents of young families.

LOOKING FOR OPPORTUNITY

In fact, Dr. Richardson sees her practice going in exactly that direction. After attending Vision by Design, a myopia management meeting, she sees her primary care practice shifting toward a pediatrics specialty. She is excited by the opportunities to slow down or even stop myopia progression with orthokeratology, rather than telling patients, “We’ll see you next year for a stronger prescription.” Dr. Richardson has another, deeply personal motivation for helping children: her father, who grew up with dyslexia, always believed that with vision therapy, his schooling experience could have been different.

A BIG-PICTURE PERSPECTIVE

Her PECAA advisors have helped her crunch numbers and weigh whether the timing is right to bring in new equipment or make other changes. “When you’re a practice owner and you’re living it day to day, business clarity seems to get lost in the weeds. You’re left wondering, ‘Is this the right decision?’ or ‘How are other people doing things?’” Once again, PECAA can be an enormous help with its big-picture metrics data from top-performing practices from around the country. These benchmarks provide her with

added perspective on her business she couldn’t gain on her own.

One of the best things about PECAA is its vast number of resources, from the consultants—most who are previous eye care professionals themselves—to weekly webinars and peer-to-peer breakout dinners. She found the latter, a mix between a networking event and a mini-convention, especially helpful as a cold-start practice.

Dr. Richardson advises new practice owners to be patient and seek advice. “As the business owner and optometrist, it’s just me making all these decisions. But to have somebody there to give you advice on the decisions that you’re making, it’s huge.

“The hard part is being patient because I have this big vision of where I want the practice to go. I’m very happy with where we are currently, but, of course, I want to make it better.” | [WO](#)




Visits to Twenty Twenty Family Vision Center are fun. Eileen Geisler, patient care coordinator, helps make sure patients walk out with a look that makes them happy.

“To have somebody there to give you advice on the decisions that you’re making, it’s huge.”

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“When I unlocked the door on Day 1, I had patients and everything I needed to succeed.”

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No Pain Yet LOTS OF GAIN



Dr. Shade-Hinchliffe

When Michele Shade-Hinchliffe, OD, was looking to add automated refraction technology to her practice in 2011, she says that her choice was clear: she would work with Marco. “It was relatively new technology then and not a lot of people were using it, so there was no way I was going to go with any other company,” she says.

Investing in technology has been a priority for Dr. Shade for many years since she purchased her practice, now known as Shade Eyecare, in 1994. The business had a long-time history in Pottstown, Pennsylvania, dating back to its establishment in the 1930s. When she acquired it, the office was inside of an old home, which can be charming but also limiting in terms of expansion and modernization. With an accelerated loan, she paid off what she owed over five years, just the amount of time on her lease in that space. Then in 1999, she moved to a bigger office in a strip mall and was ready to start acquiring new technology.

CALL YOUR REP

Marco representative **Drew Tucker** was a tremendous asset in the early days and continues to be so today. “He’s a wonderful local rep who knows that I like new technology, and he keeps me informed,” Dr. Shade says. “He was helpful in organizing the patient flow and the literal physical space and how the technology would fit.” Tucker made the selection process simple. He lead her toward meeting her goals of making the best use of her space, cutting down on prescription errors and reducing her shoulder pain from many years of repetitive refraction motions.

Dr. Shade went with the TRS-5100 from the start in both exam lanes and a *TONOREF*™ III

in pretesting. “The *TONOREF* is a huge space-saver with the tonometer, autorefractor and keratometer in one instrument down from three.” In addition to providing a high level of measurement accuracy, the slim design was a big benefit.

RELIEF FROM PAIN

After years of working with manual phoropters, Dr. Shade was beginning to feel the stress on her shoulders and neck. The TRS-5100 has a keypad that she can use to control the refraction. Eliminating the shoulder rotations from her routine has relieved the pain she was feeling at the end of each day. The configuration of the system also allows her to spend more time face-to-face with her patients while she smoothly tweaks and makes adjustments to the refractions. She appreciates the toggle switch comparison that lets patients see their old and new prescriptions in a quick comparison. “It’s a time-saver and a wow factor,” she says. “I do not assume that 0.25D change is insignificant. For some people, it makes a huge difference and they want to upgrade their eyeglasses as a result of seeing the comparison.” Patients can make that decision subjectively because they can compare the two directly. By making the exam experience more efficient, Dr. Shade has been able to see additional patients per day.

After just the first few months of having the new system in the office, Dr. Shade says she saw a decrease in transcription errors. “The fact that the prescription goes right into the system and doesn’t need to be keyed in saves time and eliminates errors,” which result in costly remakes and additional frustration to the patients, she says.



TRS-5100

The technology continues to be a tremendous asset for the business, building on the advantages of fast, accurate refractions and great patient interactions and providing her time to discuss a fuller range of vision care options and recommendations. With more thorough education, patients may opt for more premium products that better meet their lifestyle needs. “Even though patients have experienced a Marco refraction before, they still like to hear the sounds of the lenses turning on their own,” she says. They also appreciate not having to answer the age-old and stressful question: Which is better?

Looking back on her decision from eight years ago, she has no regrets about bringing the Marco technology into the practice. “I’ve had one repair. The quality is good, and the instrumentation holds up.” Plus, she knows that Marco service is just a phone call away if she ever has a question or concern. That’s a testament, she says, to the company’s reputation. | [WO](#) |

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“Patients may opt for more premium products that better meet their lifestyle needs.”



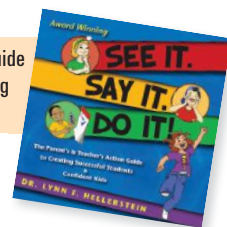
Take **GOOD CARE** of **YOURSELF!**

ODs describe what they do to stay healthy—physically, mentally and financially

You've taken the kids for their checkups and scheduled your parents' doctor visits. You even went along to make sure they understand what was happening. **But what about you? Many ODs are comfortable talking about healthy lifestyles and decisions with their patients, but their own wellness and time for self-care takes a back seat to the demands of being an optometrist and all the other roles they play. In this collection of stories, several ODs describe what they do to stay healthy and how they seek to help others achieve the same.**

Illness Knocked Career Plans Off Course *Then a new plan emerged*

Book is a guide to visualizing success.



Dr. Hellerstein

Lynn Hellerstein, OD, FCOVD, FAAO, of Greenwood Village, Colorado, went in for a colonoscopy soon after her 50th birthday on a September day in 2002 and woke up and learned that she had a tumor in her colon. While the doctor found the tumor early enough to avoid chemotherapy,

she became highly allergic to nearly all food. "Eating became something I hated, and only later did I realize it was a metaphor for my inability to digest the life I was living," she says.

Dr. Hellerstein recalls feeling like she was on a freight train, barreling toward the next accomplishment or expectation. Her children were young, her practice was growing and she wanted to write a book. This diagnosis flattened her. "After a second surgery, I became anemic, and I was so fatigued that I thought I would never leave my house. While the surgeon saved my life, I really had no idea how to put it back together again."

It took about two years and some major life changes. She shifted her goals and gave up some of the reins—a difficult task for the type A personality that she was. "I went from saying, 'I can do it myself' to asking for help. It takes courage to admit your vulnerabilities," she says.

VISUALIZING A NEW PATH

It was during this time that Dr. Hellerstein developed her *See It. Say It. Do It!* book, a guide to visualizing success. "It became a mechanism for me to live my life and expand my vision beyond sight," she says.

Dr. Hellerstein's experience changed the way she talks to patients in her vision therapy practice. "It has taken me down the path of functional medicine. If I'm working with a patient with special needs, autism or a traumatic brain injury, that patient doesn't simply have a vision problem, but there are whole body/sensory/motor issues," she says.

Working collaboratively with other providers toward the patient's progress is very important, she says.

She is also more cognizant of the demands on caretakers, especially if they have suffered an injury. "Moms or dads who have been in a car accident and suffered an injury may have a very difficult time taking care of themselves. I counsel them in visualization: what do you need to do and how can you get there? Stress only adds fuel to the fire," she says.

Indeed, in the vision therapy sessions at her practice, meditation may be a part of the process. "Let's breathe together," she tells patients. "A kid who is so frustrated that he or she can't do the homework can be helped by stopping, breathing and visualizing. Then the assignment may take a quarter of the time if those stresses are gone."

Dr. Hellerstein also credits her optometric study group and her "sisterhood" with help during her recovery and beyond. She gathers with friends for regular "camp experiences" where they laugh, drink wine, eat chocolate and together raise thousands of dollars for non-profit organizations helping women and children. | [WO](#) |

“While the surgeon saved my life, I really had no idea how to put it back together again.”

RISK FACTORS

Did you know? Women are more likely than men to...

- die following a heart attack
- show signs of depression and anxiety
- experience osteoarthritis or urinary tract problems
- experience more serious effects of sexually transmitted diseases

Source: NIH: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development

Health Scare Doesn't Derail Couple's Financial Plan



Dr. Bjore

Family Kay Bjore, OD, and her future husband were in graduate schools in different states. “We were both on fixed incomes with undergraduate and graduate loans, paying two rents and trying to save for the

occasional plane ticket to see each other,” she says. Even with their efforts to live frugally, when she graduated in 2014, the couple had a combined \$390,000 in student debt.

“That kind of debt was a constant cloud hanging over our heads,” she says. It wasn't unusual for classmates of hers to be graduating with \$200,000 or so in debt, and like many, she signed up for a 30-year repayment plan. “Then I realized, ‘Wait, I'll be paying student loan debt until I retire.’”

So the two made the decision that they were going to be aggressive about paying off the loans and planned a five-year strategy. They delayed starting a family but did buy a house because it made sense from a tax and investment perspective. They travelled some, planning shorter getaways that were less expensive. “That helped keep us motivated,” she says.

GOOD PLAN, FRIGHTENING DIAGNOSIS

Dr. Bjore began working at a corporate location soon after graduation, and about a year later began working at Yankee Eye Clinic in Eagan, Minnesota, where she still works today. They were plowing every available bit of money into paying down debt but not feeling deprived. “We had other goals, and having the power to attain those goals is really exciting,” she says.

Staying nicely on track with their financial plan, they decided to start a family. But during her first pregnancy, Dr. Bjore was diagnosed with acute promyelocytic leukemia, a rare type of leukemia, coincidental to the pregnancy. “I was having nosebleeds that lasted for one or two hours and strange bruising,” she says. She stopped by the lab one morning to get some bloodwork drawn and went into the office to see patients. Her obstetrician called her during lunch and told her to call an ambulance and get to the emergency room. The oncologist on call said that there had

been 12 cases of this type of leukemia and pregnancy, and he treated one. She started chemotherapy the very next day.

Their son was born healthy and happy, following a nearly full-term pregnancy. The following month, she received word that there were no signs of the leukemia. But Dr. Bjore did not work for seven months. Still, they kept up their accelerated payments as much as possible. In October 2019, not even 5.5 years after her graduation, she made her final student loan payment.

“I realized, ‘Wait, I'll be paying student loan debt until I retire.’”

A SCHEDULE THAT WORKS

Dr. Bjore and her husband, a physician assistant, work staggered schedules so that they can limit the amount of time that they need day care. She works 30-hour and 40-hour weeks, alternating between those schedules. As one of six doctors in the primary care practice, she enjoys seeing the range of patients and medical and vision concerns, as well as patients who come into the dry eye specialty center at the practice.

The experience she went through has affected her approach to patient care, she says. “I can sympathize a little more with the ups and downs that patients have,” recalling how challenging it could be to stay cheerful on difficult days.

Today, Dr. Bjore and her husband are planning for updates to their house and maybe some travel. “The kind of discipline we developed applies to other things. It has forced us to be open about what we want and need,” she says. “A lot of couples struggle because of financial issues in the marriage. Each and every financial decision we made was planned carefully and was good for us.” | [WO](#) |



With her health restored and loans paid off, the Bjore family is turning toward new goals.

Dr. Bjore's Advice

- Don't go without insurance.
- The short-term compromise of thrifty living is worth the long-term goals.

Give Your Brain Downtime



Dr. Jackson

Danielle Jackson, OD, says that being busy can block a person's creative flow. “If I'm in a state of constant stimulation, I am unable to hear my own thoughts,” she says. Now she makes a point of creating time for silence and a space free of distractions. That includes putting down mobile devices. “I used to scroll through my cell, looking for ideas or distractions. But since I've started doing this, I will write down my own ideas,” she says.

She's been a planner and dreamer, coming up with plans for her practice, Jackson Eye in Fairburn, Georgia, even before she identified a space. She drew a blueprint using a computer-aided design program, placing all the equipment she knew she would want. She also designed the logo, all of which she uses today. It shows that good ideas, creatively cultivated, have staying power.

As a business owner and busy mom, she finds that reset button is an important way to stay grounded. | [WO](#) |

Zonefulness

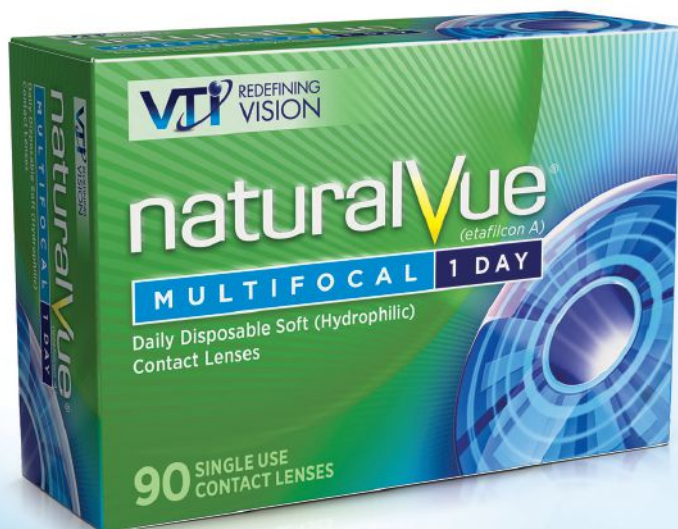
“Yoga and meditation improve my ability to focus and to improve the flow state, or being in the zone, which allows me to focus on each element each day. They also help to reduce stress and prioritize what is important. Incorporating a healthy diet helps provide energy to do all that I do.”

—Melissa Barnett, OD, FAAO, FSLs, FBCLA
Sacramento, California

Continued on page 27

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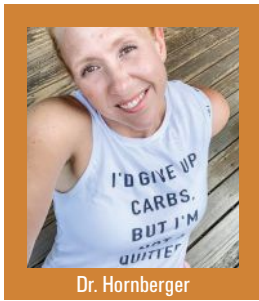


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A Weight-loss Plan That Clicks



Dr. Hornberger

Samantha Sanders Hornberger, OD, has always been healthy, “but I had struggled with weight issues since the end of high school. I’m an emotional eater, and during times of stress, I gain weight.” She tried program after program, usually able to lose some pounds for an event or goal, but then she’d gain them back. “To be my healthiest, best self, this

was something I needed to conquer.”

She discovered what most roller-coaster dieters have found: the quick fix was not sustainable. “I was always looking for a way to get to my goal as quickly as possible so that I could stop the dieting. And there was immense guilt,” she says. She believes that other women in demanding professions like optometry may share that high-achieving goal of perfection.

Finally in February 2019, Dr. Hornberger came across a program that emphasized lifestyle changes and nutrition to gain wellness and energy. Not only did she lose and keep off pounds, but she became so enthralled with how she felt and how she gained energy and confidence that she also became a certified coach in the FASTer Way to Fat Loss, a program that emphasizes whole food nutrition with intermittent fasting. Intermittent fasting can mean different things on different plans. For Dr. Hornberger, her goal is to stop eating after dinner and not eat again until after breakfast, fasting for 16 hours and eating only during an eight-hour window.

Because Dr. Hornberger is playing the long game, she can shrug off the occasional indulgences. “One Big Mac isn’t going to set you back. Allow yourself a break every once in a while, and you’ll stop obsessing that ‘you can’t have that’ on your diet,” she says. The satisfaction she gained from seeing her results led her to coach. “The program made such an impact on my relationship with food and my relationship with my body. I had so much on my plate already that I wondered if I needed to add one more thing, but I decided I couldn’t not do it. I

knew that there were women in my network who needed this.

“The interesting side benefit of losing weight and gaining endurance is the confidence at work and the confidence in my personal life, chasing dreams and setting goals. Knowing that I’m taking good care of myself is amazing, and it shows in the way I carry myself,” she says.

She also brings some of the lessons learned to her patients. Lawrenceburg, Indiana, where her Bright Family Eye Care practice is located, is a small town, so she already knows or knows of many of her patients. “My line is really blurry between personal and professional life. I talk with patients about my kids and the stories of my life. If my story will help me relate to what that patient is going through, I’ll be open.”

So she does talk about nutrition, exercise and fasting with patients. Some are genuinely curious because they’ve seen the physical effects of the program. Others appreciate that she can be blunt. One of her patients with diabetes has moved away but continues to drive 90 minutes to see Dr. Hornberger for her exams. “I’ve also had a dad come in, whose 18-year-old daughter follows me on Instagram, and he says that she repeats some of the advice I give there,” she says.

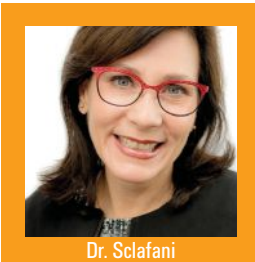
As Dr. Hornberger knows from personal experience, it can be a challenge to make sustainable changes that help you reach your weight goals. Now that she’s found what has clicked for her, she hopes she can encourage others on their path. The key thing—in weight loss as in reaching so many other goals, she says—is to surround yourself with a supportive community. | **WO** |

In addition to practicing, being a mom and wife and coaching women on weight loss, Dr. Hornberger runs The Modern Eyesite, an online educational and networking group at themodernesite.com.



At left, Dr. Hornberger and her husband, Brad, before starting their program of eating whole foods, intermittent fasting and 30 minutes of exercise five days a week; at right, two years later

“Knowing that I’m taking good care of myself is amazing, and it shows in the way I carry myself.”



Dr. Sclafani

Feeling Torn *Finding balance*

Being a mom always creates a challenge for women who want to spend quality time with kids. Louise Sclafani, OD, FAAO, of Chicago, Illinois, says during her son’s senior year in high school, she’s feeling a particular urgency to be at

every hockey game, tournament, concert or dance. While she can’t make her son young again, she is working to take care of herself, she says.

“Posture issues are a big concern, whether that comes from working on a computer or being slumped over, seeing patients. But I don’t have time to get a massage,” she says. So awareness and stretching have to suffice. She’s also had to sacrifice some of the pretty shoes that she used to wear for more sensible footwear. “The one thing that I really focus on is getting enough sleep; this is the best gift that I give myself!” | **WO** |



Dr. Sclafani and her son Liam are traveling that inevitable path to his adulthood. She’s treasuring the moments, like this Mother’s Day meal together.

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Corporate Setting Lets OD Synthesize the Best of Her PAST EXPERIENCES



Dr. Ford

When it comes to career pathways, **Diana Ford, OD**, has walked a number of them. After her graduation from Indiana University School of Optometry in 1991, she completed a residency in primary care at Illinois College of Optometry. She stayed at the school for

five years afterward, as an assistant professor. From there, she moved into an ophthalmology practice and worked at a corporate location on the weekends. Then she went to work for a large group ophthalmology practice where she managed difficult contact lens fits for keratoconus and post-laser surgery patients, as well as provided pre- and post-operative care.

When she and her former husband moved to Colombia, South America, for his work, she could not practice optometry in the country. "So I began teaching English to preschool and grade school kids," she says. That interlude ended when she moved back to Georgia and worked first with another ophthalmologist and then a laser center.

Practical issues pushed Dr. Ford into looking for new work. She had been brought on as a contractor, and her health insurance premiums tripled, plus she was commuting an hour. "The situation was not working. Then I found my way here," she says.

Specifically, she found Doctor's Exchange of Georgia, P.C., an independent optometric practice with offices across Georgia, including the National Vision, Inc.-operated Walmart Vision Center location where she works in Canton. "In every practice setting, I gained

tremendous experience but I felt like there was a level of micromanaging going on. I don't feel that here," she says.

Dr. Ford had interviewed with several corporate locations, a choice she thought was particularly attractive for a single mom because of the flexibility and benefits. She landed at her current practice, as "they negotiated well with me, and settled on a four-day-a-week schedule that allows me to participate in my children's after-school and band activities."

WRAPPING IN EXPERIENCES

In many ways, this role wraps up the best of what she had done in her earlier work. She loves teaching, and "there are teaching elements in patient encounters on a daily basis. I educate patients on their ocular health and vision, and they routinely tell me that it's the best eye exam they've ever had," she says.

Dr. Ford adds that while this feels like her own practice, she does not have the managerial worries that many of her friends and colleagues are facing. "I'm not interested in being an entrepreneur at this point. I am able to simply see my patients and provide them with a high level of care," she says. She manages those medical conditions that make sense in a high-volume practice—red eyes and allergies for example—while referring out those conditions that would require more time.

Indeed, ODs who come into a setting like hers should expect to see a wide range of medical issues that optometrists who work in private practices where most patients

have health and vision benefits might not see. "A lot of textbook kinds of cases walk through the door," Dr. Ford says, and she is happy that these uninsured or underinsured patients have access to care in her office. She is confident with her skills and the care or counsel that she provides to these patients about their next steps.

A GROWING PRACTICE

Dr. Ford's focus on patient education has helped the practice grow. "I'm seeing patients again and again, and we have gotten busier every year," she says. Patients are now referring friends and family members, too.

They often tell her that they appreciate her personal touch and attention. "I have worked in practices where patients spend two hours in the office and the doctor spends one minute with them.

That's not the experience they get here. My technician and I have a flow and system where we are efficient and friendly."

She is glad she landed where she has. "Of all the things I've done and tried, this is the setting that seems to work the best for me," she says. "The practice has been flexible with

me, and I enjoy seeing my patients, doing my work and leaving the management of the business behind when I go." | [WO](#) |

“[My] situation was not working. Then I found my way here.”

“There are teaching elements in patient encounters on a daily basis.”

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Doctor Finds Support at Every Phase of Practice in

VISION SOURCE® Affiliation

After being an associate for about eight years, **Melissa Tada, OD**, of Mountain View Vision in Colorado Springs, Colorado, opened a private practice, with one doctor, one exam lane and one shared employee. That was in August 2007, and in December of that year, she joined Vision Source® and credits the organization with helping her grow. “Today I have a wonderful partner and an associate doctor, and we have 13 full-time staff members. At every phase in my practice, Vision Source has given me new tools to bring the practice to the next level,” she says.



Dr. Tada

that vision today.” However, to keep that connection between theory and the practical application of new ideas grounded, it’s important to have multiple perspectives, which the board provides.

“I thought my point of view would be valuable,” says Dr. Tada, a primary care OD who has broad interests in treating children, managing ocular disease and specialty contact lens fittings. Practicing in Colorado’s dry climate, there’s also a demand for her experience in treating dry eye symptoms.

“I absolutely love what I do,” she says, noting that seeing patients is the best part of her day. But she’s also invigorated by the business management details of working with staff, dealing with patients and vendor representatives and understanding billing and coding and insurance requirements. “I want my mode of practice to thrive and continue to be the best option for personal and professional growth. I truly believe that the private practice OD provides the best care to our patients because of our relationships,” she says.

She’s also happy to serve as a role model and mentor for other women. “There are a lot of women in the profession who are not sure they can run a practice and have

“I want my mode of practice to thrive and continue to be the best option for personal and professional growth.”

Dr. Tada, a former high school science teacher, is also a member of the Vision Source advisory board, a seven-member board of ODs who provide feedback to the executive leadership team on which programs and resources would be most helpful to the network of optometrists and how they could reasonably and efficiently be implemented.

Dr. Tada says that she accepted the position to serve on the advisory board because “I wanted to understand better the inner workings, the decision-making process and the goal planning that takes place on a corporate level in Vision Source,” she says. “I truly believe that Vision Source originated for the betterment of private practice optometry, and it still maintains

PROGRAM FOSTERS LEADERSHIP

One of the hidden gems within Vision Source® is its Leaders with Intention program, an online program of webinars and group of network doctors and managers who share their resources and ideas on leadership training. **Dr. Melissa Tada** says the program has been invaluable to her. “I know I have been trained to be a great clinician, and it is a part of who we are to continue that study and keep up with the latest technology and changes in our profession. Yet I have not been trained how to be a good leader to my staff. That is where I have so much more room to grow. This series has helped me rethink my approach, and it challenges me to be better. Listen more and talk less!” | [WO](#) |

a great personal life. I’m here to show them that this is a great option. I may approach it differently than my male colleagues, but we all attain high levels of professional and personal fulfillment.”

She’s also a believer in the idea that optometrists can leave the profession better than how they found it. “My goal is for private practice to continue to lead the way. We are the practitioners who are active on the political front, in the realm of managed care and progressing our scope to allow us to practice to the full extent of our education,” she says. She has found that Vision Source has helped her and others have a strong voice and a seat at the table. “The profession of optometry will look different in the future than it does today, but it is ours to build and lead.” | [WO](#) |

“[The profession of optometry] is ours to build and lead.”

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Five Must-have Products for an OCULAR AESTHETICS PRACTICE



Dr. Shen Lee

“You brush your teeth every day and you wash your face. Why wouldn’t you wash your eyelashes?”

Bridgitte Shen Lee, OD, FBCLA, FAAO, of Vision Optique in Houston, Texas, carries five products from OCuSOFT that she says are essential to her growing ocular aesthetics practice. All are for sale at her practice, providing patients with maximum convenience while bringing incremental sales and returning patients to the practice. Dr. Shen Lee, who serves on advisory boards for OCuSOFT, explains why these products are so important to her patients and practice.

NUTRITIONAL SUPPLEMENTS

Zytaze® Dietary Supplement provides nutritional support so that botulinum toxin injections can work at maximum efficiency. “Botulinum toxin injections are expensive for cosmetic patients but also for those patients who need a lot of them for medical purposes,” says Dr. Shen Lee. “Taking Zytaze for five days prior to the injection (whether cosmetic or medical) provides additional zinc and other nutrients that allow the toxin to bind with zinc and extend the efficacy of the injections,” she says.

That means that patients who were coming in for injections every quarter might be able to come in every four or five months instead, she says. For that reason, once she began selling Zytaze in her practice, the product has sold itself, she says.

“EYELASH SHAMPOO”

Dr. Shen Lee calls OCuSOFT cleansing products “an eyelash shampoo, and patients understand that. You brush your teeth every day and you wash your face.

Why wouldn’t you wash your eyelashes?”

She recommends OCuSOFT Lid Scrub® Eyelid Cleanser to dissolve and remove oil and dirt, in combination with OCuSOFT HypoChlor® (0.02% hypochlorous acid) for patients who need a stronger product.

She recommends OUST® Demodex, a go-to product, especially to women who wear eyelash extensions and to anyone who shares a house—and particularly a bed—with a cat or dog. “It’s not that the pet transmits demodex mites to the owner, but their dander can create a host environment in the bedding,” she says.

RETAINÉ®

Healthy eyelids and clean eyelashes are a first step in dry eye treatment, but the Retaine® family of dry eye products is another important component of Dr. Shen Lee’s practice. Retaine is one of the first OCuSOFT products she started with, and it remains a workhorse in her work with dry eye patients. She recommends it to patients who show signs of meibomian gland dysfunction and dry eye, and to satisfy the requirements of most insurance carriers. “The majority of the prior authorizations require that the doctor put a patient on a different nonprescription drop for the patient to use a minimum of two times a day for a minimum of two weeks,” she says.

Because she and her staff have studied these requirements, she is able to recommend Retaine and document this step. Then the prior authorization for additional treatment comes through faster and with less frustration.

In many cases, using Retaine will also alleviate a patient’s symptoms. “When the ocular surface is dry, it’s negatively charged. Retaine MGD is the only positively charged preservative-free lipid supplement, so it is attracted to the ocular surface via electrostatic attraction and forms a protective layer. In addition, it is a Step 2 dry eye treatment recommendation according to the TFOS DEWS II report,” she says.

ZORIA® PRODUCTS

Finally, Dr. Shen Lee offers patients Zoria® Lash Intensifying Serum and Mascara. Neither contain any prostaglandin analogs, so she tells patients that these products offer a way to enhance their eyelashes without the potential negative effects of using a prostaglandin or the mess and bother of glues or other extension adhesives.

“Optometry needs to own ocular aesthetics,” says Dr. Shen Lee. “As business owners, this is an opportunity for us to provide more services and products to our patients that we know will work well and be safe.” She and her staff emphasize that the doctors have chosen these products after researching the available options, offering them at the same price as other retailers. “We want to be sure that patients can start with their treatment or new products right away,” she says. | WO |



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Outsourced Billing a Key Aspect of **CASH FLOW** and **PROFITABILITY**



Dr. Laura Lang with husband Dr. Ryan Lang and children

“Outsourcing with a billing company was the most reliable and profitable way for us to maximize insurance reimbursements.”

Laura Lang, OD, has been a co-owner with her husband **Ryan Lang, OD**, of Lang Family Eye Care in New Berlin, Wisconsin, for the past six years. From day one of opening her practice doors she has outsourced the claim filing and billing to a third-party service.

Dr. Lang says that she realized this was the right choice for the business when she was still at Illinois College of Optometry and had just a brief time to learn about the business side of optometry.

“When it comes to filing medical claims, there is so much to learn in order to get correct and maximum reimbursement. As an OD, business owner and mother of three, I knew I didn’t have the time to learn everything there is to know about claim filing, so I decided to leave that up to the experts,” she says.

MEDICAL BILLING IS COMPLEX

The decision to outsource made the entry into medical services easier because she knew from the start that she had help at this level. “Outsourcing our billing allowed us to delve comfortably into medical optometry instead of shying away from it and accepting only vision care plans,” she says.

That, in turn, allowed her business to grow at a faster rate. With so much competition in retail with online eye exams, online eyeglasses and online contact lenses, Dr. Lang’s practice is able to set itself apart in a unique way. “I’m proud to say that we have become quite the urgent care resource for ocular emergencies in our area and see many of these types of patients every day,” she says.

FOCUS ON HER STRENGTHS

“As a business owner and OD, I wear many hats, and the list of responsibilities is long,” she says. She really did not want to add “claim filing expert” to the list. It would have taken time at the start and on a continual basis. She also realized that hiring an employee dedicated to billing in a practice is a unique skill. That expertise can be hard to find, and she was hesitant to create a model where her business and revenue becomes very reliant on an individual employee who could end up leaving or isn’t working up to par.

“We knew outsourcing with a billing company was the most reliable and profitable way for us to maximize insurance reimbursements. During my clinical rounds, I was able to witness other practices utilizing third-party billing services in their practice, and I noticed the positive impact it was making,” she says.

LOWER ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLE

From a cash flow perspective, the main goal for any practice is to maintain a low accounts receivable

number. When Dr. Lang first opened her practice, she started with a billing company she no longer uses. “We were a pretty small account for the big business and weren’t a priority for it, so our AR wasn’t as low as we expected it to be when outsourcing our billing services,” she says.

Then she made the switch to VisionWeb, and it “was like night and day,” she says. The switch resulted in lowered accounts receivable immediately. Indeed, the company says that its successful submission time is two times faster than the national claims rate. Plus, she has a dedicated account manager who is always attentive and ready to answer questions. The account manager helps with logistics such as training on pulling benefits and coding diagnosis codes to get the maximum reimbursement.

In addition to these benefits, not having to spend time on the phone with insurance companies is a huge time-saver for Dr. Lang and her staff. “VisionWeb gives me peace of mind that my claims are being paid and gives me the freedom to focus on patient care and growing my business,” she says. | [WO](#) |

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Brand New Doctor's Appointment Book Gets a **STRONG ASSIST**



Dr. Augustino

Patient awareness of enhanced service offerings creates appointment demand for VSP Global® Premier Practice participant

“I’ve had front desk staff members tell me that they’ve never seen an associate’s book fill up as quickly as mine did.”

For about six months, **Bianca Augustino, OD**, had a very long commute. A 2018 graduate of Inter American University of Puerto Rico School of Optometry, Dr. Augustino had decided she wanted to settle and work in Raleigh, North Carolina. However, her graduation date prevented her from sitting for the spring state board exams, so she had to wait until February’s exam offering.

Despite this, she did have a license to practice in New York, so she filled in for practices there about 10 days a month. “I started commuting. I’d book an Airbnb and fill in as much as I could during those 10 days. The other 20 days of the month I’d be back in Raleigh, looking for future opportunities.”

GAINING EXPERIENCE

This time gave her tremendous opportunities to learn. She worked in ophthalmology practices, private optometry practices, other corporate-affiliated practices, as well as in locations where patients didn’t speak English. For these patients, she used a translator for exams. “Every day was different. I didn’t know if I was going to see glaucoma patients or perform refractions all day, and I didn’t know the staff. It taught me a lot,” she says.

Dr. Augustino also made some connections with private practices near her home that seemed promising; however, agreements fell through in two cases when conversations turned serious. She then decided to take a chance on Premier

Pathways, a new Premier Program offering that matches private practice doctor-owners with new ODs entering the industry. It was because of Premier Pathways that **David Holler, OD**, of Clarity Vision called her. Initially, she told him she wasn’t going to start looking for a job until after she passed her boards. Even so, she sat down and had coffee with him, and the two discussed the private practice environment in the state and more. Before the board scores were released, Dr. Holler called her back. “Come in for six days; I’ll pay you per diem, and you can get a feel for what the practice is like,” he told her.

That was a smart move. Once she passed her boards, she began to get attractive offers from practitioners who hadn’t previously returned her calls. “I ultimately chose to stay with Clarity Vision. I have a lot of respect for Dr. Holler. He and **Ashley Powell, OD**, treated me like we’re all equal,” she says. She works full-time in the practice while the other ODs work two or three days a week.

A FULL APPOINTMENT BOOK

Often, new associates come into the office to find a relatively clear appointment book and are told to reach out to the community to fill it. This hasn’t been her case. “My schedule is always full, and it has been since the very beginning. I even asked, ‘How am I getting all these patients?’ There had been little marketing to announce that I was joining the practice,” she says.

Dr. Augustino found that it’s partially the result of being a Premier Program practice. When VSP Vision Care patients look at

the doctor-locator on vsp.com, practices that are a part of the Premier Program are identified with a special orange banner. When they called the practice, they were able to get an appointment quickly, and the payoff was her full schedule. “I’ve had front desk staff members tell me that they’ve never seen an associate’s book fill up as quickly as mine did,” she says.

The range of experiences that she had when she was doing fill-in work in New York have also helped her be more streamlined. “I can read if a patient is a straightforward comprehensive exam or if we need to spend a little more time discussing a condition,” she says. By keeping the process as efficient as possible, she has the room to dedicate those extra minutes to the patients who need it.

BUILDING PATIENT BASE

Overall, the practice benefits from getting new patients through the door. Those who need eye care services beyond a refraction are likely to return to the practice for their care. The optical stays busy with patients who want to leverage their VSP Vision Care plan with the excellent value that the plan provides to them, including savings on additional pairs of eyewear.

Dr. Augustino says that she appreciates the education she has received through the VSP Vision Care provider email. “It’s nice to have a portal for this information where I can learn more about the business of optometry. When I see an article synopsis or headline about a topic I don’t know well, it’s great that I can read it and learn as I’m going.” | wo |

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Read more in Discover the Opportunities under Growth Strategies on womeninoptometry.com.

Three Must-have Checks for Selecting an

OPTOMETRY MARKETING COMPANY



There are three factors to look for when choosing an optometry marketing company, all of which I learned the hard way. I used to think, “I’m a smart, educated person. Why can’t I handle all my practice marketing myself?” I wanted to control the process, not hand it off to some unknown entity who doesn’t know me or my practice.



By Diana Canto-Sims, OD, of Chicago, Illinois

“There is real expertise that goes into (good) marketing.”

The decision to try out marketing services started out as something practical. I simply didn’t have the time, and neither did any of our staff. I kept promising I would do all the steps required to advance my own online visibility—posting regular content, researching the most popular keywords, looking into traffic patterns and bounce rate...but all that takes precious time to learn and master. Frankly, I decided that I would rather use my time seeing patients, not trying to figure out how to update my website or use Google Analytics.

My first experience with a company was pretty terrible. But I learned from that experience, shopped around afterward and found EyeCarePro. Using its services has made a huge difference to my practice revenue and stress levels, and it was one of the best business decisions I have ever made. I discovered that there is real expertise that goes into (good) marketing, particularly online, which is where most people go when looking for any product or service today, including finding an eye doctor.

The results are telling. My new patient numbers are always increasing, as is capture and revenue. My time and focus were set free to focus on patient care, which is why I got into optometry

in the first place. These results were accomplished primarily through excellent optometry-focused search engine optimization (SEO), great optometric content, help with Google reviews and ongoing strategy and consultation.

Most marketing companies for optometry tend to offer what seem to be similar services. They build websites, can manage social media and some of them do SEO. So how can a company help a practice take off? Look for these three components.

1) The company needs to know about optometry.

This might seem like a no-brainer, but finding a company that actually understands optometry is important. The account managers have to know how a practice works, what happens in the lane, eye conditions and treatment options. When I found the right company, not having to explain anything but simply hit the ground running, it was a fantastic change of pace. It told me right off the bat that we were going to do this at a higher level. My expectations were pleasantly met and exceeded. Plus, it was pretty great not to have to explain things like capture rate, recall, blue light protection and ortho-k.

2) The company should have dedicated marketing consultation.

Having someone who is responsive is really important. This goes way beyond tech support. A good marketing company should be a partner in a practice’s growth. Look for a company that provides regular consultation that includes

strategy and implementation of your growth goals, from planning optical events to helping guide the online strategy so the practice can reach the right patients at the right moment. I want someone who’s brainstorming on my behalf and then making it happen. Being part of the process allowed me to have control of my brand without having to do the heavy lifting. My rep works with dozens of practices, as do all his colleagues—meaning I get the benefit of the best strategies and practices that are tried and true across literally hundreds of practices that are engaged in their marketing.

3) The company should be focused on new patient growth.

Having looked into several companies out there, I found that many of them point to *website visits* and *impressions* as indications of success. But numbers online are meaningless if they don’t result in appointments. EyeCarePro only does eye care, so the representatives know it inside and out, and my dedicated marketing consultant is a huge asset to us. At the end of the day, it delivers new patient appointments, which is what really counts. We average about 30 new patients per month now, and with the help of our marketing consultant, we’ve garnered over 175 Google reviews. With a company that focuses on new patient growth and can show me those results in a transparent way, I’m set. | [WO](#) |

Read more about Dr. Diana Canto-Sims of Buena Vista Optical in Chicago and her frame line, La Vida Eyewear, on [dianacantosims.com](#).

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Read more in Power to Build Your Practice under the Growth Strategies on [womeninoptometry.com](#).

WOMEN IN THE News



Dr. Coyle



Dr. Amster



Dr. Lewandowski



Dr. Mack



Dr. Brown



Dr. Ou



Dr. Griffin



Dr. Casey



Dr. Reiman



Dr. Al-Namaeh



Dr. Bower



Dr. Burick



Dr. Robinson

▲ **Jennifer Coyle, OD, MS, FFAO**, has been selected to serve as the dean of Optometry at Marshall B. Ketchum University's Southern California College of Optometry. Dr. Coyle will assume her new position Dec. 1, 2019.

▲ **Erica Griffin, OD**, of Woodsville, was honored as the New Hampshire Optometric Association OD of the Year.

▲ **Corinne N. Casey, OD, FFAO**, of Baltimore, was honored as Young OD of the Year by the Maryland Optometric Association.

▲ **Joanna Davis Reiman, OD**, of Raleigh, was named Young OD of the Year by the North Carolina Optometric Society.

▲ **Mashaeh Al-Namaeh, OD, PhD**, has joined the Niswonger College of Optometry at Tusculum University as a founding faculty member.

▲ **Elizabeth Bower, OD**, of Napoleon, and **Tiffany Burick, OD**, of Poland, recently received the Ohio Vision Project Student Loan Repayment Program Award from the Ohio Optometric Association.

▲ **Roxann Robinson, OD**, is running for reelection to House District 27, which is entirely within central Chesterfield, Virginia. She's represented House District 27 since 2010.

▲ SUNY Optometry has announced that **Deborah Amster, OD**, will join the school as the new chief of pediatric service. She will head the implementation of the University's new Center for Pediatric Eye Care, which is set to open in early 2020 and will offer expanded



(l-r): Dr. Metwalli and Dr. Shook

services to children and their families.

▲ **Magda Metwalli, OD**, of Charlotte, and **Yvonne Shook, OD**, also of Charlotte, received

the John D. Robinson Clinical Excellence Award from the North Carolina Optometric Society.

▲ The American Optometric Association (AOA) and Optometry Cares®—The AOA Foundation announced **Crystal Lewandowski, OD, FFAO**, of New England College of Optometry, has been awarded a grant through the 2019 Healthy Eyes Healthy Children Community Grant Program.

▲ **Carla Mack, OD**, has been named global head, professional affairs, at Alcon. In her new role, Dr. Mack leads professional affairs within Alcon's Global Vision Care Franchise.

▲ **Kristen Brown, OD**, has been selected to be the associate dean of clinical affairs at the New England College of Optometry.

▲ **Jocelyn Ou, OD**, a cornea and contact lens resident at the Ketchum Health University Eye Center, is this year's recipient of the Bert C. and Lydia M. Corwin Contact Lens Residency award, as chosen by a committee of members in the Section on Cornea, Contact Lenses & Refractive Technologies of the American Academy of Optometry.

▲ **Col. Adrienne Ari, OD**, of Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany, was selected as the Armed Forces Optometric Society Army Optometrist of the Year.

▲ The American Academy of Optometry Foundation (AAOF), in partnership with the Allergan Foundation, announced **Loretta B. Szczotka-Flynn, OD, PhD, FFAO**, of Case Western Reserve University, as the 2019-2020 recipient of the Allergan Foundation Research Grant for her project, "Modeling Corneal Endothelial Cell Health Parameters as Predictors of Keratoplasty Stress." The AAOF, in collaboration with the Beta Sigma Kappa International Optometric Honor Society, also named **Sima T. Mozdbar, OD**, of University of Houston College of Optometry, as the 2019 recipient of the Beta Sigma Kappa (BSK) Research Fellowship, which will fund her project, "Cognitive Dysfunction and the 25-Item National Eye Institute Visual Function Questionnaire."



Dr. Szczotka-Flynn



Dr. Mozdbar

▲ **DeAnn Fitzgerald, OD**, vice president of the Neuro-Optometric Rehabilitation Association (NORA), was honored with NORA's Founding Father's Award in recognition of her lifelong dedication to the exploration, elucidation and enhancement of the concepts surrounding the nature of the human visual process.

▲ **Mamie Chan, OD**, of Albuquerque, New Mexico, was honored as OD of the Year by the Great Western Council of Optometry.

▲ **Stephanie Schmiedecke Barbieri, OD, FFAO**, chief, low vision service, at the UIW Rosenberg School of Optometry, and her team were recognized in the community for providing excellence in vision care for persons who have vision impairments at a San Antonio Americans with Disabilities Act celebration. | [WO](#) |



Col. Ari



Dr. Fitzgerald



Dr. Chan



Dr. Barbieri

Photo by Sgt. Marcy Sanchez, Landstuhl Regional Medical Center

OD Takes Her **VISION** on the

ROAD

Mobile geriatric practice allows OD to fulfill a mission and get started on her own entrepreneurial path



Dr. Herald

“Health care should not only help people live, but it also should make people excited about living life.”

Dr. Herald's penchant for fun extends to her marketing.

Christina Herald, OD, wants older people to live their very best lives. Vision is an integral and fun part of that, she says. So she has launched Integrity Eyecare in Seekonk, Massachusetts, delivering eye care to nursing homes. Her colorful logo that shows four linked pairs of eyeglasses and engaging and quirky photography on her website and social media show her affection for the geriatric population.

“Whatever I do, I want it to be unique and differentiated. I want a sense of community in my practice,” she says. “Health care should not only help people live, but it also should make people excited about living life,” she says.

The challenge for many elderly patients is access. That's one reason why she decided to launch her entrepreneurial career with a mobile practice that brings eye care services and enjoyment to home-bound and nursing home residents in eastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

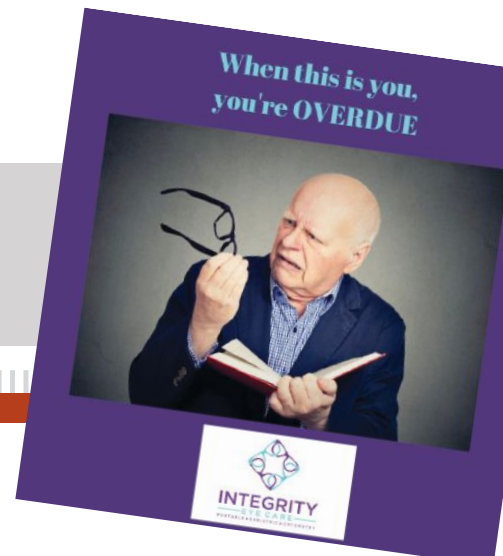
There's certainly a practical element to the plan, too. It's a good way to get started without adding onto student loan debt. “I save on rent and am able to circumvent certain costs by being mobile. It's a great way to prepare to start cold...by making it a little less cold.” Once she has established herself in the communities she plans to serve, she may decide to open a more traditional office one day.

MISSION-DRIVEN

Dr. Herald was very young when she learned the importance of good vision for the elderly. An older relative suffered a terrible kitchen accident and her impaired vision from macular degeneration actually made it worse. “Eye health and vision are a significant part of lifestyle and quality of life. Our responsibilities as optometrists go beyond diagnosing eye disease,” Dr. Herald says. “It is equally important to educate patients about how to maximize vision so they can continue to live happy, safe lives.”

To get started with her vision for Integrity Eyecare, she visited several local nursing homes to gauge the interest from nurses. They were thrilled with the idea that someone could bring these key services to their patients. Dr. Herald also took business classes so she could make smart decisions for her startup. As soon as she could prove to herself that the idea was a viable one, she set out to acquire not only the necessary equipment but also icebreakers and conversation-starters, such as a slot machine and basket of prizes, which she takes with her on her visits.

She is searching actively for additional contracts in her region, noting that it takes some lead time to get credentialed in every facility. In order to set herself on the path to this goal as quickly as possible,



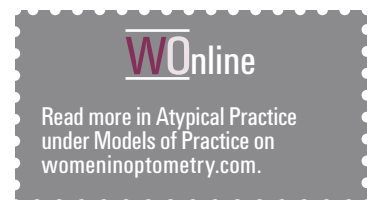
ALL PACKED UP AND READY TO GO

Dr. Christina Herald is ready and willing to add more nursing home and in-home visits to her schedule. Eye care and other health professionals who are looking for eye care services for the elderly in eastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island can contact her through her website at integrityeyecareonline.com. **WO**



she and her husband have been paying off student loan debt as aggressively as possible and limiting their spending. It's an easy choice, she says, as she is excited about what she's building and grateful that she can do so without having to take on more debt.

Dr. Herald has some advice to young ODs, especially young women, who want to be entrepreneurs. “Make sure you do something you are passionate about and something that feels true to yourself. Don't go with the traditional route just because it's what everyone expects or people are telling you it's a safer bet. You are the one who has to live with the consequences of the decisions you make. Have the courage to take a chance on yourself.” **WO**



OFFICE Design



There's a modern feel with light gray on the walls and flooring and pops of colors from turquoise accent chairs in Dr. Martin's practice.



LAKES FAMILY
EYE CARE
A clear view to healthy eyes

Designing on a Budget



Dr. Martin

A Fast Start

In August 2017, **Maria Briceno Martin, OD**, decided to move forward with her dream of practice ownership. Her second daughter was just 1, and while she had a great job, she decided the time was right. She found a space in her hometown of Miami Lakes, Florida, inside of a professional building with other health and business providers. She told her contractor that "I needed it done as fast as possible because I couldn't be without a job."

Her husband, **Greg Martin**, a firefighter, helped in many ways before and during construction, and he helps manage the practice now. Her sister **Carmen Crespi** had opened an orthodontics practice about five years earlier, so she provided many tips. The practice opened about six months after she made the decision to start.



Welcome Back

Leigh Anne Green, OD, was able to buy a practice from a retiring OD after she and her family returned to Waco, Texas, after eight years abroad. Her contractor—fortuitously—was part of the Magnolia Homes team, the remodeling and design business owned by the *Fixer Upper* stars Chip and Joanna Gaines. "He gave me suggestions on making it less expensive with no renovation loan, and we did it, step by step," Dr. Green says.



Dr. Green

A remodeled optical and bringing in more natural light were among the first phrases of improvements.





Dr. Rebarber

Making Everything Just So

Jenilee Rebarber, OD, spent about six months finding just the right location in St. Johns, Florida, and then about three months remodeling the space. The design of the space is all her own. She wanted a modern farmhouse style, she explains, complete with a touch of the traditional Tiffany Blue®, her favorite color. Dr. Rebarber found inspiration online as she carefully selected each detail from the décor to light fixtures and more. Dr. Rebarber opened the doors to SightHealth Primary Eyecare in February 2018.



Attention to detail results in a carefully curated but comfortable look.



Dr. Toler

Simple Is Sensible for Vision Therapy Practice

When Allison Toler, OD, FAAO, and her practice manager husband, Cal Toler, of Clermont, Florida, outgrew the cute and inexpensive house where she launched her vision therapy (VT) practice, she found a larger space nearby. The four-week remodel from pediatrician's office to VT space cost less than \$8,000, allowing for more funds to be invested in staff training and equipment. The color scheme was selected by Dr. Toler's childhood friend, Brian Patrick Flynn, who is an HGTV Dream Home designer. | [WO](#) |



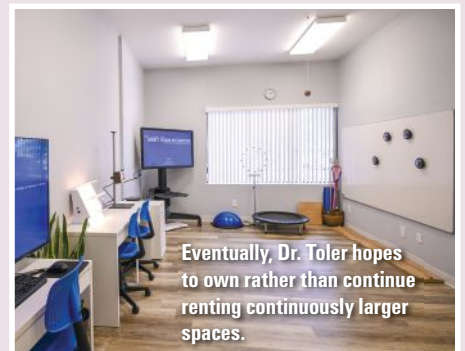
Reclaimed barnwood creates an eye-catching focus; frames are cued up on an old pool table.



Dr. Williams

Found and Reclaimed Objects Add Style

A 1970s-era building wasn't much to look at, but it offered Kristi Kessler Williams, OD, and her husband and business partner, Jim Williams, a lot of space for expansion for Eye to Eye Optometry in Mexico, Missouri. "We didn't have a huge budget, but we made the best of it," she says. They purchased the building in 2017 and found that their neighbor was a tropical hardwood craftsman, whose unique designs are now showcased in the practice. They sourced local materials, and friends and family pitched in to help.



Eventually, Dr. Toler hopes to own rather than continue renting continuously larger spaces.

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ODs Find a **PARTNERSHIP**

Provides Them With Flexibility for a **UNIQUE PRACTICE**



(l-r): Dr. Markose
and Dr. Nguyen



Doctors found they shared a vision for how to run a practice and live their lives.

Patients at SocialEyes Eye Studio in Prosper, Texas, can expect special treatment when they walk through the doors to see **Lynn Markose, OD, and Tamanh “Tammy” Nguyen, OD.** “We offer a luxurious experience with eye massages and masks as part of the exam and coffee or wine when patients are looking at frames,” Dr. Markose says. They also sell vegan and organic eye makeup, as well as cleansers and removers and products for eyelash health. “There’s a display in our lobby, and some patients get a makeup makeover from one of our assistants while their eyes are dilating.” It’s a little bit different from your traditional eye exam, but that’s exactly what they were going for when they opened their doors in April 2017.

ENCOURAGING EACH OTHER

The partners became friends by chance. Dr. Nguyen took over a sublease at a Walmart store in 2009 and was nervous about the undertaking in this new role, but she found Dr. Markose’s email and decided to reach out with her questions. Dr. Markose previously worked for the doctor whose lease Dr. Nguyen took over, and emails turned to an ongoing Google chat about everything from their subleases to their families. It took almost a year for them to meet in person, but along the way, they

discovered many similarities, particularly regarding their goals for the future. As 2015 turned to 2016, the two started talking more seriously about their desires to be working less and home more with family.

They started the search for a location outside of Dallas, Texas, in Frisco, but they quickly realized the market was saturated. A little north, however, the community of Prosper was growing and had great potential. They found a space in a new construction strip center among a clothing shop, hair salon, bank, gym and other medical professionals.

Dr. Markose says that those early days were a bit overwhelming—there were so many decisions to make and details to choose—but

completely worth it. Their plan for this practice was quite different from their Walmart subleases in terms of experience and also now managing a retail side. They started with an empty shell and collaborated with an interior designer and architect to bring their visual ideas to life, working with Eye Designs for some of their optical displays. “We envisioned modern, straight lines, open concept, lots of gray and white with a pop of yellow here and there,” Dr. Nguyen says. “We wanted

to be a place to go to for pampering after an eye exam where we could do an eye massage or eye makeover.” Dr. Markose adds that the space would be trendy as a boutique-style practice. Many of their frames, makeup and eyelid and eyelash cleaners are from independent companies, and, as owners themselves, they like to support small businesses.

ROOM FOR GROWTH

There are two exam rooms and a treatment room that will house additional dry eye treatment services in the future and are now used for eye massages. Down the road, the doctors see themselves renting out that space to an esthetician or individual who is licensed to give Botox injections. They also have two staff members—it’s been a journey to find the right ones, but now they are quite happy with their team and will look to add to it as they grow.

“We both had young children and wanted a situation with more flexibility and less stress so that we could spend more time with our families,” Dr. Markose says. “We agree on a lot, and our characteristics complement each other.” Dr. Nguyen adds, “The only regret for me is not doing it sooner, but everything happens for a reason.” Indeed, coincidentally both Dr. Markose and Dr. Nguyen are Catholic and share the saint name of St. Lucy, the patron saint of the blind. “We’re meant to be partner optometrists,” says Dr. Nguyen. | [WO](#) |



Touches of whimsy are plentiful in this office.

INTERESTED IN ADDING A SPECIALTY? CONSIDER LOW VISION SERVICES

By Alexandra Copeland, OD, FAAO, of Innovative Eye Care in Kalamazoo, Michigan



Dr. Copeland

Low vision services are often overlooked when an optometrist thinks about adding a specialty to her office. Practitioners often shy away from this area because they think it requires knowledge of complex optics or too much time and investment without enough profit. Both are untrue. Low vision services can be a great addition to any practice.

A lot of optometrists' only experience with low vision patients was in optometry school. They associate low vision with two-hour exams and think there's no way they can fit that into their schedule. However, remember that completing a routine eye exam in school likely took nearly an hour as well. Doctors now see patients in half that time or less. This can be the same for low vision patients. Low vision patients do tend to run on the elderly side.

Blocking an hour for the initial exam will provide enough time to complete all exam elements and discuss any patient questions. These hour blocks can help fill a new practice or associate's schedule.

Low vision evaluations should be billed as medical

office visits. A lot of time is spent on education and counseling on things like the ocular condition's effect on the visual system and different low vision services and devices available. Billing a low vision exam based on face-to-face time instead of exam elements completed allows the practitioner to be

compensated better for her time. Medical insurances do not offer benefits for low vision devices like handheld and electronic magnifiers. Selling these devices creates an additional office revenue stream.

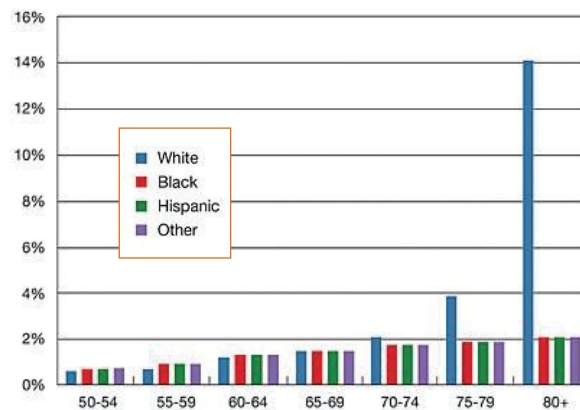
A small investment in low vision devices can still have a big impact as doctors build their low vision patient base. I would suggest starting out with one binocular distance telescope, a few low-powered hand-held and stand magnifiers and

a couple pairs of fit-over filters. It's great to have an electronic magnifier in office, but these products are a bigger investment. If you don't have the extra funds, reach out to company reps to see if they are willing to loan you a device to start.

Optometrists can apply basic refractive principles to solve a lot of low vision patients' needs. Many visually impaired patients complain about trouble reading. For patients with mild to moderate impairment (best corrected vision about 20/40-20/80), a stronger add can resolve this issue. Optometrists should be familiar with the strongest add power available in their progressive lens of choice. Recommending switching to a lined bifocal or single vision reading lens for extended near tasks to give a larger field can also make a big difference for these patients. These suggestions require no additional equipment or further optical knowledge. An in-office eyeglasses purchase also adds to office revenue.

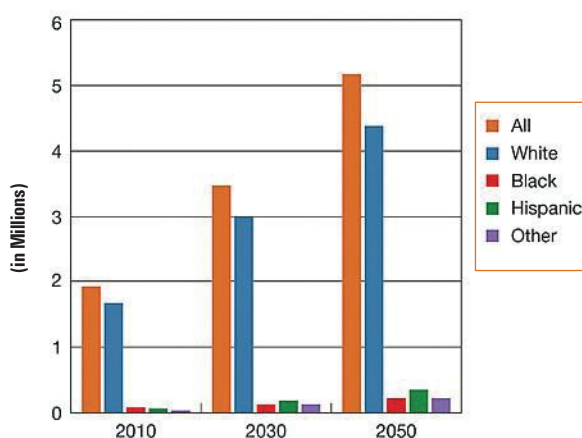
As the U.S. population ages, the need for low vision services is only increasing. The National Institutes of Health estimates the number of Americans with visual impairment will nearly double from 2010 to 2050 to reach more than 8 million. An optometrist's inherent knowledge of optics and ocular disease makes her the ideal candidate to provide low vision services to this growing population. |WO|

2010 U.S. Prevalence Rates for Age-Related Macular Degeneration by Age and Race



Source: National Institutes of Health

Projections for Age-Related Macular Degeneration in 2010, 2030 and 2050



Source: National Institutes of Health

AGE-APPROPRIATE SCREEN TIME LIMITATIONS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

By Maria Pribis, OD, FAAO, of Ocular Prime

During the first year of my daughter's life, she was definitely attracted to mama's iPhone, but it wasn't too hard to get her attention onto something else. In her second year, it's becoming harder because she now associates mama's iPhone with the people she sees on FaceTime—like dada when he travels. It's recommended that infants and toddlers have no tech time at all, but a more realistic recommendation is to limit tech time to the absolute minimum. Our screen time is limited to special occasions.

I do understand that children ages 6 to 12 will be familiarized with tech time as a part of their learning process. The current challenge for this age group is finding a healthy balance between tech-time and real-time experiences.

FAMILIARIZE YOURSELF WITH PARENTAL CONTROLS

Children in this age range will likely need to use a home computer for several things, including homework assignments. The home computer should be a safe space for enhancing the learning process, and maybe even for some reasonable entertainment as well. Parental controls aren't difficult to set up at

all, so take the time to make sure they are properly put in place.

WATCH FOR SIGNS OF CYBERBULLYING

From ages 6 to 12, there's a chance your child could encounter some form of bullying for the first time. Bullying is never acceptable. The website stopbullying.gov offers the following warning signs:

- Noticeable increases or decreases in device use, including texting
- A child exhibits emotional responses to what is happening on his or her device
- A child hides his or her screen or device when others are near
- Social media accounts are shut down or new ones appear
- A child starts to avoid social situations or becomes depressed, losing interest in people and activities enjoyed in the past | [WO](#) |

For more information on screen time limitations for children of all ages, read the series available from Dr. Pribis on ocularprime.com or womeninoptometry.com under Perspectives then Editorial.



Dr. Pribis

FIVE TIPS TO MAXIMIZE YOUR EARNINGS

By Laurretta Justin, OD, of Orlando, Florida

There is nothing wrong with asking for a raise that reflects the hard work that you do, but there are some approaches and best practices that will always get better results than others. You need to present your case for why you deserve a raise, and you need to be prepared to negotiate.

1) Do your research. Before any salary negotiation, conduct background research to determine your professional market value. You need to have a solid foundation for the request and realistic expectations. Study salary trends for our industry in your geographic area. Use sites like PayScale, Glassdoor, O*net and Salary.com to find out the market rate for associate ODs in your area.

2) Discuss issues at contract negotiations or when you are hired. If there is a review policy established for your practice, familiarize yourself with this policy in the employee manual.

3) Take on more responsibility. As an associate, you may not own the liability or the assets of your practice, but you do own your job. You may not be the CEO of the practice, but you should be the CEO

of YOU. Treat your employment as your own business, and you will share in its profits. Identify ways you have helped build worth through increasing average patient sales, bringing in a new specialty or improving efficiency.

4) Talk about the future. Show you're invested in the practice. Every practice owner values loyalty. Explain what you want to do in the future and how you plan to contribute to the growth of the practice.

5) Don't be discouraged by a "no." If you don't get the salary or pay increase you requested, it doesn't have to be the end of your negotiation. Request an interim performance appraisal with clearly defined goals and salary adjustment before your next annual review.

It's not always obvious when, or how, to ask for a raise. But if you do want to get a raise, you have to ask for it. Properly preparing before you make your proposal can vastly increase your chances of success. | [WO](#) |

Dr. Justin is the creator of the CEO of You® Practice Success Blueprint.




Dr. Justin

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