

# *BASICS FOR YOUR PRACTICE*

## *First in a series*

By Mary Schmidt  
EyeSystems

It's that time of year again. Time to look back over the previous 12 months and figure out how you're doing. Has the year slipped by without a plan of action? Do you find yourself not really aware of what's taking place in your practice?

I always find that the beginning of the year is the perfect time to review the basics.

For instance, what do you want to improve about your practice? How about generating a better bottom line? Would you like more order and organization in your day-to-day operation? Wouldn't it be nice to take a few days off and have a little more peace of mind, knowing that everything is running well in the office?

Here are some "beginning of the year" ideas for you to start with:

When it comes to money, my advice is to plan for 10 years from now not for the end of the day, week or month. Stop thinking about the size of the check you'll write but, instead, consider the benefits gained from investing in your staff and practice.

How many eye exams do you perform per hour? Two exams per hour is the average but unfortunately, with insurance program participation, that might not sustain the economics of your practice. Depending on your situation, you may need to provide three or even four exams per hour. While this may not be the way you imagined seeing and caring for your patients when you were first starting out, it may be necessary to keep pace with real-world economics.

Before soft contact lenses started arriving in the marketplace, doctors selected frames with their patients, took PD's and seg heights. Some even answered their own phones. Times changed and we adapted. We hired staff to perform the optical and front desk duties, freeing up time to work more closely with contact lens fittings. It's once again time to adapt. Consider integrating an experienced staff member into the exam process. Let them perform some of the routine actions, allowing you to spend time on the critical portions of the exam. If you'd like to begin this process, the first step is to take a few minutes and make a detailed list of everything you do in the exam process.

Example:

- Greet patient
- Check visual acuities
- Check pupil response
- Check stereo
- Check color
- Cover test

You get the idea. Once you have a full list, look it over and determine which skills you could train a staff member to perform. This won't transpire overnight, but that's to be expected. You are setting the foundation for the next ten years. Patience and persistence will pay off in the long run.

I am often asked how many staff members should be employed in order to run a successful practice. This is such a difficult question and it really depends on how well you've set the foundation of employment. How do you hire staff? Do you decide on the most qualified person and compensate them well? Do you look for a person who is willing fit into your compensation package? I cannot stress enough that you will get what you pay for. If you hire based on compensation, don't be surprised when you have an unmotivated staff member and it will take two people to do the work of one.

Do your staff members clearly understand their duties and how to perform them? You may think so but several studies have determined that more than half of staff members do not understand what's expected of them. And nearly half don't feel properly trained to perform their duties. It is essential to have a job description that covers every duty required. Sit down with each staff member, review the job description and then help them clarify their understanding of each duty. I encourage you to ask them about their understanding of their position and strongly advise that you will get better cooperation if you listen and wait for their answers. Fight your impulse to tell them what to do in the beginning of your conversation. Then you will be able to plan a training program that will suit your specific staff and practice needs.

Another area to consider is how you structure your week. Do you concentrate your office hours to maximize time or are you available 40+ hours per week with sections of time that are unproductive? Take a few minutes and review your schedule for the previous quarter then try to compress your schedule to allow for the least amount of downtime for you. Ideally, allow yourself a four-day week seeing patients and allotting one day for administrative work or free time. This will make both you and your staff more productive.

It is never easy to change old habits but if you're tired of the way things have been why not try this as your New Years resolution?

NEXT IN THE SERIES:

ORDER AND ORGANIZATION