

# RESIDENTS AND FELLOWS

## HOW TO BECOME THE BEST OPHTHALMOLOGIST

The secrets to running a top-notch ophthalmic practice: part two.

BY SURESH K. PANDEY, MBBS, MS, AND VIDUSHI SHARMA, MD, FRCS



*This month's installment of "Residents and Fellows" comes from Drs. Pandey and Sharma. In part two of this article, they offer more valuable pearls for the young ophthalmologist—from marketing yourself to achieving work-life balance.*

—Section Editor Sumit "Sam" Garg, MD



There are many important aspects to being the best at anything. Here, building on the five secrets in part one, we set out six additional secrets to achieving greatness as an ophthalmologist and provide the keys with

which you can unlock them!



### MARKET YOUR PRACTICE EARLY ON FOR SUCCESS

Marketing and image building is an essential part of a practice today; *marketing* is no longer considered a dirty word in medicine. In medicine, however, there exists a greater responsibility to be ethical and appropriate. We owe it to the dignity of our profession to ensure that our marketing is not in poor taste. Marketing is not synonymous with advertising, and aggressive advertising is still controversial in medical circles. Subtle marketing, on the other hand, is less expensive, often more effective, and also more acceptable. With the increasing

presence of the corporate sector in the medical profession, however, advertising is here to stay.

Marketing in the medical field can initially be cold call-type efforts like newspaper advertisements, billboards, etc., where the practice makes unsolicited contact with a wide audience. For a new practitioner, this is necessary, because he or she needs to inform the widest possible audience in the area of practice about the available services and expertise. Later, one can progress to inbound marketing using the Internet and social media for potential customers, giving them a platform from which to ask questions and get to know the practice and its services. The practice can then implement in-house advertising, where the available services are prominently displayed on the premises with clear information. Staff must be willing and able to answer any queries related to these services.

It is important for a young practitioner to control spending on marketing. After the initial few cold calls, he or she should turn to more focused marketing and not try to "outdo" competitors in advertising. It is also a good idea to organize educational awareness activities and some sort of free screening checkup (varies in different cultures) at public gatherings. This is an inexpensive and effective way to market a practice. Finally,

the ophthalmologist must aim for a scenario in which satisfied patients become the practice's best marketing tools. Word-of-mouth publicity is the most convincing to potential customers.



### ASSUME A LEADERSHIP ROLE BY MAKING PRESENTATIONS AT CONFERENCES AND HOLDING OFFICES OF MEDICAL SOCIETIES

To grow professionally among peers good oratorical as well as public relations and communication skills. The young ophthalmologist can start by attending the meetings of the medical societies in his or her area. He or she can consider organizing activities at which his or her presentation skills can be displayed. Societies always need young, dynamic people willing to take on responsibilities—without displaying ego. Young professionals should not get involved in factional politics and should always be respectful toward senior ophthalmologists.



### GROW THE PRACTICE

If one can provide top-notch services, patient volume is bound to grow. The new ophthalmologist needs to ensure the delivery of successful surgical results as well as an excellent experience for patients. This would mean a focus on all services provided in the practice, including reception, waiting time, comfort in the waiting room, adequate facilities for drinking water, toilets, refreshments, and, if needed, reading material to keep patients busy while waiting. It is important to provide professional and reasonably quick service, a cheerful and cooperative staff, and an adequate response to all queries and concerns. Of course, the satisfaction provided by the surgeon to the patient is the main driver of his or her happiness. That said, surgeons still need to develop the soft skills so that patients feel reassured and confident. Learning to connect with patients and empathize with their concerns is paramount. As the practice grows, it is a good idea to incorporate more services, depending on financial viability.



### MANAGE THE TEAM OF OPHTHALMOLOGISTS, OPTOMETRISTS, AND STAFF

When the surgeon has other ophthalmologists and optometrists working for him or her, it is crucial and often difficult to keep them satisfied and motivated. One important factor is opportunities for their financial and/ or professional growth. The surgeon should be accessible and listen patiently to the staff's problems. Just like patients, the staff also wants to feel heard and understood. Small group activities can foster team spirit among all the members and make them feel valued. At the same time, the head physician must let it be known that he or she observes everything and that any misdemeanors will be acted upon.



### MANAGE ONESELF: WORK-LIFE BALANCE

In a busy practice, efficiency is important to ensure that the patients are seen quickly and the surgeon's working time is maximized.

Ophthalmologists need to learn to delegate all except the core work. Developing a good team and employing quality staff will help alleviate some of the burden. Key here is ensuring that there are enough staff members to guide patients and answer their queries. The surgeon must also develop effective communication skills so that he or she can give a quick, comprehensive explanation to the patient.

An efficiently managed practice will leave time for family. The most important factor in achieving work-life balance is first to recognize its need and importance. Work is just one aspect of life, and it cannot replace the equally or often more important aspects like health and family. Ambition is an endless race, so one should work to satisfy oneself and not to get ahead of others.

### FINAL SECRET: THE TAKE-HOME MESSAGE



Running one's own practice is a huge amount of work and responsibility. Surgeons should think hard and long before choosing exactly what they want to do.

When choosing to start one's own practice, it is important to realize that the first few years are crucial and that the primary focus should be on patients' satisfaction. The surgeon must stay strong even in the face of minor setbacks. One should keep the big picture in mind and not fret over small things. In the end, the ultimate aim of life is to be happy, and professional success is just one means of achieving that. ■

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