

Differentiate Your Practice Through Technology

Make an effort to help the community of healthcare consumers understand how you are improving the level of eye care.

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For decades, advances in technology have improved both the diagnosis and treatment of vision and eye health. The optometrist's practice took on a new and improved feel, for example, each time that visual field testing technology stepped forward. In this environment, patient care delivery models improved, but so did the differentiation of a practice from others through technology.

A call to all optometrists

Often, a practice website describes the use of advanced technologies — and perhaps one or two O.D.s in that doctor's vicinity are equally sophisticated — but the reality is that every optometry practice must increase the use of new technologies. Then, share these new technologies with the community of eyecare consumers so they understand how you are improving the level of care.

In this article, I present 10 technologies that can help differentiate your practice from others. I caution against evaluating these solely on their direct financial return on investment

(ROI) due to the number of procedures you can perform or because they help sell more of a particular product. The reason: The healthcare world is transitioning from fee-for-service care toward fee-for-value care, so O.D.s must demonstrate effective outcomes of quality vision and eye health just to be included on provider panels.

In addition, how patients rate your practice impacts your ranking in the community and, ultimately, your relevance to those who seek eyecare services. In this environment, advanced ophthalmic technology becomes more critical to our survival. With this in mind, here are the 10 technologies:

1 Wavefront refractive guidance

To enhance the understanding of the fine details of refractive error, especially high-order aberrations, implementing the latest wavefront vision assessment technology can provide previously unseen issues that affect visual acuity. With refraction occupying a significant amount of chair time, increased utilization of wavefront refracting systems can: 1) provide a guided starting point for

refraction, 2) reduce patient processing time and 3) increase prescription accuracy.

2 Topography-guided contact lens fitting

While soft contact lenses dominate the field, specialty RGP lens fittings are on the increase, as O.D.s invoke their capabilities to provide highly refined vision, especially on otherwise difficult-to-fit eyes. Corneal topography has been a proven technology, and new software can improve initial lens fitting by predicting fit characteristics and allowing the optometrist to perform hypothetical changes to lens design before a lens is ever placed on the eye. Professional service fees for topography-guided contact lens fitting allow the practice to receive a fair reimbursement for highly technical patient care.

3 Electrodiagnostic testing

Non-invasive and objective electrodiagnostic tests — such as electroretinography for various retinal diseases (e.g. glaucoma, etc.) and visual evoked potential for amblyopia and other vision problems — not only allow us to understand the

impact of chronic diseases and visual conditions, they also can provide the necessary data to enable us to make critical diagnostic decisions and focused treatment plans.

4 Electronic health records Governmental incentives aside, the clinical rationale for monitoring patient data through time and for providing improved clinical workflow are the true values of this technology. EHR will soon provide secure doctor-to-doctor communications, and patient interaction with the practice will increase, creating a more trusted relationship with the patient base.

5 Computerized retinal imaging The commitment to periodic preventive imaging and

disease-specific documentation of disease protocol can enhance a practice's efforts to diagnose and treat diseases in their early stages. Optometrists who implement retinal imaging should deploy specific use protocols to receive the maximum value of adoption of the technology.

6 Optical coherence tomography Assessment of the retina, especially the macula, and the optic nerve and its structures is highly differentiated with optical coherence tomography (OCT). The latest progression analysis software offered by OCT manufacturers puts change-awareness in the O.D.'s hands and increases the clinical accuracy of diagnostic and treatment decisions in both AMD and glaucoma.

7 Electronic patient communications Practice management software systems have been ingrained in clinical business for more than 30 years, but recently, add-on technologies have improved a practice's ability to communicate with patients. The benefits: increased patient attendance (through e-recall), growth in patient bookings and management of post-examination survey results. Many of these systems integrate with social media sites to enhance a practice's visibility.

8 Digital ophthalmic lens fitting measurements The explosion of high visual definition lens technologies make it necessary to increase the accuracy of lens fitting measurements beyond the capabilities of the p.d. ruler.

These technologies come in a variety of forms, from tablet computers to floor-standing devices and tablet-enabled handheld devices, making them easy to implement in any optical.

9 Secure online patient portals Commonly provided by an EHR vendor, personal health record portals are increasingly used to provide a direct connection between patient and provider. Soon, doctors will be expected to deliver and receive secure patient communications through online portals, and studies show that practices that engage with these tools see a higher patient retention. Delivery of educational information and snapshots of clinical data is also enabled through personal health records.

10 Patient education delivery tools Whether used for in-office education or via electronic delivery mechanisms, refined patient education systems improve patient understanding for better retention of information and increased patient commitment to added diagnostic and treatment protocols. These systems also support point-of-sale education for optical, contact lens and/or vision correction technologies.

The short list

These technologies represent a short list of opportunities that can be integrated into an optometric practice to provide a significant differentiation for both the O.D. and the practice. When evaluating these opportunities, you can be frozen from a

purchasing decision due to determining a direct ROI. But perhaps more important is the indirect value the practice receives when patients see an ongoing commitment to technology: "I love coming in for my eye appointment because of all of the great technology that is used here," heard from one or more patients goes a long way. **OM**



Dr. Jens has been in group private practice for more than 20 years. He co-founded an eyecare EHR software company and serves as CEO, helping O.D.s in the U.S. and Canada. He has no other financial interest in any of the technologies mentioned. E-mail him at scottjensod@isthmuseye.com, or send comments to optometricmanagement@gmail.com.