

Eyecare Practice Tool Kit

Professor Nizar Hirji offers his views on an unusual new text aimed at those managing practices

This book is unlike other recently published practice management or business books in optometry, in that the information contained is intended to be extracted and tailored to individual practice needs. The idea of this 'tool kit' came about because the authors, all of whom have thriving practices, felt that the material available for patient education often did not fit their practice philosophies, was not well written, was limited in the range of topics, was expensive and frequently talked down to the patient.

The authors also argue in the preface that optometrists are very good communicators, but the need to repeat at length somewhat complex information regarding a patient's visual welfare (although necessary from time to time) is not seen as effective use of their time and has a negative impact on practice productivity.

Patient handouts

To enable readers to extract material from the book, a CD-Rom of the text is provided. The publisher gives readers permission to reproduce the patient handouts for instructional use only. The copyright notice is effectively a disclaimer regarding liability for any injury and/or damage related to any use of the material.

The book is divided into six parts. The first contains 56 potential patient handouts covering topics ranging from 'Accommodative disorder', to 'Family medical history and risks.'

What struck me immediately was that not all handouts were intended for patients. Three, namely 'Accommodative disorder', 'Convergence insufficiency' and 'Strabismus' are specifically written 'to accompany reports to school nurse and other professionals' which is a great idea and a superb practice builder.

The usual topics of vision and eye disorders are well covered, but there are some not so common in the UK that are worth a separate mention. 'Attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder and vision' is directed to parents and points out the association of convergence insufficiency with ADHD and the need to have all



children with learning disabilities attend for a complete functional vision examination.

'Drugs that cause problems with the eyes' warns patients to alert the optometrist if they are taking certain (a generic list is given) medications that can affect vision, and the need when taking these medications, to consider UV-absorbing lenses to protect the eyes.

'Eight reasons why you should purchase your eyewear from us' is a leaflet to stop spectacle prescriptions from being dispensed elsewhere by a competitor, while 'No perfect pair' is a leaflet designed to promote multiple pairs of spectacles.

Finally, 'Family medical history and risk' is about educating the patient on the importance of knowing personal and family history and its influence as a risk factor for eye problems. This handout ends with six bullet points about 'protecting your eyes' which includes the use of sunglasses, wearing a brimmed hat, eating a diet rich in fruits and leafy vegetables, monitoring blood pressure, limiting alcohol intake and stopping smoking.

Practice administration

Part 2 of the book is a collection of 97 templates of 'Letters and forms' that may be useful for day-to-day practice administration. Not surprisingly, many are sample examination record sheets, follow up record sheets, referral forms, information forms, and supplementary paperwork for eye exams, binocular vision investigations, contact lens fitting and aftercare services and other procedures including laser vision correction and low vision.

This section also includes the forms

and papers with respect to the financial transactions between the practice and the patient, and the 'informed consent or refusal' paperwork. Interestingly it also has a sample patient survey questionnaire.

'Practice administration and sample contracts' in part 3 covers what we would refer to in the UK as personnel paperwork to do with managing staff. The samples shown refer to US employment law. For the UK practitioner, a more appropriate source would be Association of Optometrists' specimen contracts.

Part 4 is designed to help practices put together a practice policy handbook. The document when generated will set out the practice's policies and facilities, give clear guidance to staff about providing optometric services, set the ground rules for the required standards as well as describe the employee's responsibility and accountability, and hopefully promote a good and safe working environment. From an employment contract perspective, reference to a practice policy handbook is one approach to incorporating additional terms that can be varied and updated (eg health and safety issues).

Part 5 is entirely devoted to the business relationship US optometrists have with healthcare providers, and part 6 is a repeat of part 1 in Spanish (the first language of some 35 million Americans).

For UK practitioners there are the invariable Americanisms, spelling variations and US nomenclature, which have to be weeded out. Nevertheless, the material in parts 1 to 4 would be useful reading for any practice owner or manager considering revising their paperwork, patient and practice data collection, and/or information flows.

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● **Professor Nizar K Hirji** is principal optometrist and consultant, Hirji Associates, Birmingham