Let's Talk Business!

Sasha Radford, OD, is a practicing optometrist out of Illinois. A member of the American Optometric Association, Dr. Radford attributes her success to "personalized and attentive patient care."

To help us understand more of what she credits her successes to, we asked her a series of questions to dive into her pillars of success.

DO YOU RUN A PRIVATE PRACTICE, GROUP PRACTICE, OR CORPORATE PRACTICE?

I partner with two other optometrists in a private group practice with two offices – Pontiac Family Eye Care and Fairbury Vision Center; we also have a part time associate optometrist in our Fairbury location.

HOW MANY PATIENTS PER DAY DO YOU SEE?

We typically see between 12 and 16 patients per doctor, depending on the types of visits needed: comprehensive exams; medical visits to monitor macular degeneration, glaucoma, dry eye syndrome and other conditions; contact lens-related visits; and various types of ocular emergencies.

HOW DO YOU MAKE THE ONES YOU SEE "COUNT"?

Our motto is "We believe eye care is about more than your vision – It's about YOU!" We strive to emphasize the patient experience and care for people, not just eyes. It's common for patients to believe they're only coming in for glasses or contact lenses but we make a point to discuss their current visual status and the future of their vision and ocular health as well.

As part of our comprehensive exam, we offer Optos wide-field retinal imaging and iVue iWellness OCT screening to aid in identifying ocular diseases of the posterior segment. Patients love to see images of their own eyes and reviewing these together gives them a better understanding of ocular diseases we are checking for or monitoring.

We also provide MPOD testing with the QuantifEye for every patient between the ages of 20 and 80 at no charge. This is a quick way to assess risk for macular degeneration and leads into a conversation with each patient about other potential risk factors for the disease. We feel this is such an important screening since MPOD is one of the few risk factors that can be improved upon. We've discovered that over two-thirds of our patients have an MPOD score of less than 0.5 and we make recommendations for diet change and supplementation as appropriate.

In partnering with EyePromise, we are able to provide our patients with quality supplements we trust to be effective in reducing macular degeneration risk. For patients who already have macular degeneration, we perform the Macula Risk genetic test to determine which supplement is best; we commonly have recommendations for a zinc-free AREDS formula so having that available from EyePromise is great to get the patient on the right track to slowing progression.

WHAT'S YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE AS A BUSINESS OWNER?

Balancing patient care with administrative responsibilities is the biggest challenge I face. I juggle a variety of roles throughout each day in addition to seeing patients – staff management, staff education, technical support of electronic records, fee setting for services and materials, marketing, and community outreach. I also consider my role as a lifetime student important to keep up with the rapidly changing advances and developments in eye care. Doing all this while providing the best care possible to my patients is challenging.

HOW DO YOU MANAGE PRACTICE EFFICIENCY?

We have a schedule template to follow when making appointments, specifying the number and type of appointments available on any given day; this has been developed and modified over the years to correct any bottlenecks or issues that could slow us down. We also have a huddle with all staff each morning to review the schedule, share caveats, and make plans to make the day go smoothly. We utilize electronic medical records which streamlines charting. Our program also has a Patient Tracking application that we use to identify where each patient is in the office at any given time and how long they have been waiting at each location. This alone has improved efficiency by making us aware of the time we spend in each area of the office.

HOW DO YOU HANDLE STRESS AND CONFLICT IN THE WORKPLACE?

We try to be available to each other and employees when they need to express frustrations and we do whatever we can to alleviate causative factors. In stressful situations out of our control, we realize the importance of staying positive to set a good example for the staff. We plan team development activities throughout the year, so the staff can do something fun together to relieve stress and improve rapport for stressful times.

HOW DO YOU ADDRESS A BUSINESS PRACTICE THAT ISN'T WORKING "CORRECTLY"?

We have a full staff meeting and department meetings once a month; during these meetings we introduce new policies and protocols when we've recognized something has gone wrong. We also communicate with staff daily when we discover something is not being done well to quickly resolve issues and future problems.

HOW DO YOU ADDRESS STAFF TURNOVER?

Staff turnover can be disappointing and stressful, but we try to see it as an opportunity to add more valuable players to our team. We keep a batch of resumes on file from previous applicants or others who have expressed an interested in working with us. We utilize social media to advertise openings. Due to the wide variety of computer use in today's medical environment, we require applicants to submit their resumes electronically and provide an application that may be completed electronically as well. After interviewing candidates, we invite the top contenders to visit the office and shadow staff to gain a better idea of responsibilities and how a typical day goes.

DO YOU HAVE A "NEW STAFF" ONBOARDING PROCESS?

We perform an orientation in which we review our policy manual and rules, give a tour of the office, and introduce the new employee to his or her coworkers. We provide online training courses to be done during the first couple of weeks and allow time for the employee to shadow others for several days. Recently we began the concept of having a "buddy" – one person in their department who is responsible for training, making the new employee feel welcome, and answering his or her questions about the job. We do a 30-day check-in "review" with the new staff member to discuss how the experience is going so far.

Sasha's Top Tips for a Successful Practice

1

Provide excellent patient care by being able to communicate with and relate to patients from all walks of life and scenarios. Behave not just as a doctor but also as an educator to your patients – do your best to make sure they understand their conditions and why preventive care is so important. Be flexible with patients and allow them to play a role in their care when possible.

2

Diversify your offerings. In today's eye care market, optometrists cannot rely on optical and contact lens sales alone to survive. Provide medical services for the management of dry eye disease, glaucoma, macular degeneration, diabetes, and others. In particular, dry eye disease is difficult for patients to manage on their own due to the endless treatment choices available over the counter. As optometrists, we can recommend the best treatment tailored to each individual and have many available in office for purchase. Be available for emergency services around the clock for injuries and foreign bodies. Implement the latest technologies in testing equipment to enhance your and your patients' understanding of ocular conditions.

3

Partner up. I could never manage two offices on my own. My two partners and I have adopted different roles pertaining to different aspects of practice management. This really helps divide the administrative workload, so we don't feel overwhelmed by all the varying responsibilities. We appreciate each other's administrative skills and moral support.

4

Delegate. Identify key staff members with leadership capabilities; train and develop these skills. We've trained our technicians to perform refractions to improve exam efficiency and they do an excellent job. We are in the process of training three of our technicians, one for each doctor, to scribe during exams to reduce time spent on entering data into electronic medical records.

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