

The Heart of Practice Satisfaction

Melanie Kell



The where, why and how of what you communicate to your patients about their eye health and eyewear can make or break a potentially profitable, long-term relationship.

Ensuring patients leave their appointment feeling satisfied and so impressed they return for all of their eye care needs can be a challenge in this competitive industry. Yet according to Linda Hailey, small business consultant, author and professional speaker, this is achievable. Ms. Hailey says there are some simple ways to begin building patients' satisfaction in practices to not only keep patients coming back, but also benefit the bottom line and the business' reputation for care and customer service.

MODEL	DESCRIPTION	PRACTICE RECOMMENDATION
Incident	A story	The biology of the eye and what was found in the examination
Point	Why is the story important?	How daily vision is affected and how this could make the patient feel
Benefit	What are the key takeaways?	The solutions available to help the patient feel better and experience enhanced vision

Figure 1

“Two things are integral when aiming for complete practice satisfaction: informing and educating patients in a way that is comfortable for them, and approaching every consulting situation positively,” said Ms. Hailey.

“Providing information to patients is about considering the content, timing and delivery of knowledge, customer service and taking on a ‘helping’ ethic, and of course, approaching every interaction in a positive way.

“The result is patients leave with good feelings, backed by information, believing they have received the best care possible.

“In this way we are able to increase their trust in recommendations provided to them, which leads to positive word of mouth, and we also have the opportunity to make a marked impact upon conversion and sales,” said Ms. Hailey.

Making Satisfaction a Reality

Recent research investigated patient response towards practices when they were offered eyewear which matched their personal preference and lifestyle, and they were able to leave with a solution.

A key finding showed that progressive wearers who were recommended Transitions adaptive lenses were 79 per cent more likely to be completely satisfied with their practice following the consultation, recommendation and experience of the product.¹ Further, 89 per cent of clear lens wearers who were offered Transitions lenses had a positive experience wearing them.

“The study shows the positive effects for practices in creating a flow of information between eye care professional and patient. These patients either found a solution for problems such as glare and changing light encountered in their job, or found eye care which best suited their active lifestyle. And they left the practice fulfilled and happy,” said Ms. Hailey.

Creating a Positive Approach

Ms. Hailey said creating a practice environment where practice satisfaction happens organically and every patient leaves 100 per cent happy takes more than simply waking up in the morning and approaching work with a positive attitude. However she said, strategies can be employed to integrate that positive attitude with effective information sharing across all areas of consulting – and this can have a profound and positive impact.

Timing and Delivery

She said that although informing and educating patients is essential, it is easy to either make this process extremely effective... or extremely confusing.

“Creating context is integral for people to understand new concepts or process information which is completely outside their knowledge base. To give a basic example; sharing information about eye care solutions before the results of the examination can be completely confusing to the patient because they don’t know what problem is being helped or fixed,” said Ms. Hailey.

She advised considering the physical areas within the practice in which information can be exchanged.

“The practice manager may need to try taking patients to another room where they can sit on the same level as the optometrist and discuss results following an eye exam. This can provide the perfect environment for the patient to understand what has been happening with their vision and what solutions and products are available to assist.

“Practice managers and healthcare professionals I consult have found patients were more comfortable with this arrangement and had a clearer mindset when discussing solutions for their care, which ensured they left satisfied with the practice’s care. These practices also achieved better conversion,” she said.

Positive Approach to Recommendation

Recommendations can deliver a solution for a minor problem or make life a little easier for those who suffer from chronic problems. By providing positive recommendations, and focusing on the good news, you can help patients walk away feeling positive and satisfied with your practice.

“As a speaker I use the Incident, Point, Benefit model and have found this is a tactic to be effective for healthcare professionals,” said Ms. Hailey.

Following this model, a recommendation could play out as in Figure 1.

“Speaking positively and clearly is also key. Jargon or technical terms in speech are unfamiliar territory for anyone who doesn’t work in the industry – so reserve technical terms for writing. Speaking positively has also been found to influence a patients’ satisfaction with the practice they visit,” added Ms. Hailey.

In a recent study by Transitions Optical, three out of four consumers who said the eye care professional used positive language when making a product recommendation and discussing product benefits had a positive overall experience.²Comparatively, 58 per cent of consumers who said their eye care professional used negative language, including use of product disclaimers, reported having a negative overall experience.

“Speaking positively is about adjusting the frame of reference to speak in the active voice and focus on solutions available,” she concluded.

Two-way Education

It is just as important for eye care professionals to understand patients’ motivating factors as it is for patients to be informed of their condition.

“Think of this as two-way education – the patient understands their condition and care available, and the consulting professional provides this information based on the patient’s complaints, lifestyle and preferences,” said Ms. Hailey.

“Spending a minute asking about their job, interests or what situations present difficulties in seeing will ensure you can offer a sound recommendation for eye care and have an opportunity to provide the patient with that great feeling they get when experiencing better vision for the first time.”

Reduce Anxiety

Another important strategy to ensure patients have a positive practice experience, is to effectively impart knowledge aimed at reducing their anxiety. People can be nervous about the instruments used and the examination of their eyes, but a few minutes discussing what the consultation will involve before it takes place will calm nerves.

“It is a chance to increase patients’ knowledge of the biology of their eyes and delicate areas you will examine. By reducing the anxiety it is also a chance to build trust, which can be valuable when the time comes to recommend eye care services and products,” she said.

Stronger Relationships, Deeper Trust

Ms. Hailey concluded that by focusing on the patient experience, and by taking time to consider how information is shared and how it flows between patient and eye care professional, you can build a stronger relationship. As a result, a deeper trust will be formed.

“This is where patients leave a practice completely satisfied with the care and products recommended to them and continue coming back in future. Even better, it is these experiences which create word of mouth and enhance a practices’ reputation.”

[About Linda Hailey](#)

Linda Hailey is a well-known small business consultant, author and keynote speaker. She is the author of *Kickstart Marketing and Your Business Your Future* and is a regular expert on Kochie's *Business Builders* TV program. In 2012 Ms. Hailey developed a webinar based Business Skills Course for the UNSW School of Optometry and Vision Science, which aims to give optometrists practical business development and marketing skills.