BUILDING A DRY EYE PRACTICE

Insights drawn from an integrated practice setting.

BY JADE COATS, OD

The best way to focus on building your own dry eye practice is to look for disease, listen to patients, and educate them. Sure, fancy equipment can help to quantify dryness, but becoming more aggressive about managing and treating dry eye disease (DED) can be quick, inexpensive, and rewarding.

PAY CLOSE ATTENTION
Simply by using basic tools already in your office, you can investigate the signs and symptoms of DED more thoroughly, which will help you to establish a dry eye practice quickly. Although patients’ subjective chief complaints are helpful, staining the cornea and assessing the meibomian gland function of every patient can also help you to understand the severity of their DED status. Spending a few extra minutes with patients to identify any evidence of DED and to educate them about their condition will benefit both them and your practice.

At our practice, once ODs, MDs, and technicians started asking the right questions and listening to patients’ answers, we were astounded by how many of them, young and old alike, experience symptomatic DED at some point in their lives. Being aware of and checking corneal and tear film integrity are just as important as listening to patients’ primary, secondary, and tertiary complaints. Interestingly, patients exhibiting DED often vaguely
describe their vision as blurry, foggy, or hazy and their eyes as watery and burning but not necessarily dry. Taking the time to educate patients on why their eyes feel the way they do and what their treatment options are encourages them to keep their follow-up appointments. It’s awesome to see patients make connections, such as recognizing the correlation between the nighttime use of an overhead ceiling fan and the chronic blurriness in their morning vision, or realizing that watery eyes can actually signal DED.

KEEP THE PATIENT IN THE GAME

Implementing a recommended follow-up protocol involving two to four annual appointments can help motivate patients to stick with their treatment plans.

QUICK TIPS

- Use basic tools such as sodium fluorescein staining to consistently look for signs and symptoms of DED in every patient.
- Ask patients questions whose answers could point to a DED diagnosis.
- Implement a follow-up protocol to motivate patients to adhere to their treatment plans.
- Establish a dry eye treatment protocol.

ESTABLISH A PROTOCOL

If yours is an OD-MD practice, it is important for you and your fellow eye care providers to establish a dry eye treatment protocol. For example, my colleagues and I explain to patients exactly why we must prime and prepare their corneas before cataract or refractive surgery. By making them aware of their DED and ocular surface problems preoperatively, we help to optimize surgical outcomes. We are also setting more realistic expectations that they may experience DED in the future.

RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

The earlier DED is identified and treated, the better the outcome. Following the tips outlined in this article can help you to establish a dry eye practice.

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