

# Worrisome Words

For optical dispensaries, one simple six-word question can mean a serious problem

“Where can I have this filled?” These can be the six most worrisome words

in optical dispensary management. How many times have you heard patients who, upon being handed their eyeglass prescriptions, ask that question...despite the fact that they were an arm’s length away from your optical dispensary while in the reception area?

Often, this question signifies a troubling truth: that a practice’s optical dispensary has fallen so far off of patients’ radar that they ask a question whose answer is, literally, right in front of their eyes.



I call it “gift shop mentality.” Rather than receiving the careful attention worthy of an integral part of the overall patient eyecare experience, some practices treat their dispensaries as an afterthought—one whose importance lags far behind the core revenue stream provided by patient care.

The optical dispensary already turns a profit, so, you may ask yourself: if it isn’t broken, why fix it? Meanwhile, far more patients are walking out the door with their prescriptions than into the adjoining dispensary area. That’s money out the door.

The dispensary should be a natural, connected arm of your practice where *prescriptions* become *products*. Following are a few factors to consider toward making this a reality.

## HAND-OFF PROCEDURES

What procedures do you have in place to insure proper hand-off from exam room to dispensary?

- **WALK AND TALK.** In some practices, doctors may physically walk patients to the dispensary for a discussion with the optician concerning that patient’s needs. This “walk and talk” approach shows patients that the dots are being connected between doctor and optician. However, in some practices it simply may not be practical.
- **BUZZ ME IN.** Others use a buzzer system that summons the optician to the exam room, where the doctor introduces the two parties and explains the recommendations in front of both. From there, the doctor leaves the patient to the care of the optician, who personally escorts the patient to the dispensary.
- **EHR OPTION.** With the advent of electronic health records (EHR), many practices now send prescriptions directly to the dispensary to be picked up by the patient. So long as the doctor’s notes include clear, concise recommendations, this usually gives staff the opportunity to discuss various options with patients. Here, it’s the client-servicing prowess of the optical staff that comes most heavily into play, leading to the next big issue...staff training.

## STAFF TRAINING

Does your staff possess the skill set to properly guide patients on lens/frame selections, and do they

have a command of optical theory to confidently and accurately interpret the needs of the patient based upon the written Rx?

Optical staff should provide the same level of service and expertise patients have come to expect on the professional side of your practice. Only when this consistent, personalized level of service is achieved does your dispensary truly become a worthy extension of your practice—one that sets you apart.

You can help your staff stay current on their industry know-how, and provide training when it is lacking. There are many educational options for optical teams. In some licensed states, opticians are required to complete continuing education classes, many times offered by state organizations and national conferences. In states where CE is not offered, opticians can also participate in various online or in-print courses. Require and motivate staff (through incentive programs) to work toward ABO certification if they have not already done so.

## DEMONSTRATE THIS!

If you are going to position your dispensary as a solution center, it must have all the available lens demonstrations. This can be as simple as hands-on demonstrators from manufacturers, or as complex as the new electronic technologies that provide not only measurements but also play video demonstrations of products.

The larger point is this: your dispensary is competing with advertisements communicated through crystal-clear, high-definition TVs. And though your dispensary also provides many attractive benefits, such as proximity and personalized service, this is one instance where the competition's visual appeal needs to be matched by your own.

Finally, today's lens choices, for example, are as vast as they are varied, and patients want to fully understand all their options. Empowering them with knowledge will increase confidence in their purchase and, just as important, in your dispensary's ability to meet their needs.

## A Hands-On Hand-Off


**Experience has shown patients need to be invited or given a reason to visit the dispensary. Their visits must be aspired to rather than assumed. Practices, therefore, should develop and hone a hand-off method that makes the dispensary a seamless part of the overall eyecare experience.**

**There's no magic bullet here: the ideal hand-off protocol will vary from practice to practice depending on patient demographics, peak people traffic periods, and exact dispensary location.**

## HOW DO YOU LOOK?

Is your dispensary eye-catching and inviting? Take a good look at your dispensary—as you would if you were the patient, not the provider. It should be void of clutter and well organized. Displays and frames should be cleaned on a regular basis. Merchandising should be fresh and current.

Sometimes minor improvements can go a long way in driving traffic. And, if you really don't like what you see, it may be time for an extreme makeover.

These few simple steps can merge your dispensary into your practice, making it more efficient, more profitable...and a much easier answer to the question, "Where can I have this filled?" 

— Joseph Casorio

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