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Approach Growth With a Plan

At Southern Eye Care Associates, a Vision Source® practice in Valrico, Fla., practice partners and husband and wife Branning Hollis, OD, and Mona Kardani, OD, FAAO, run their business rather unconventionally – but very successfully.

Now nearly 4 years old, the practice has seen significant growth and is reaping the rewards of recent changes as well as being Vision Source® members. They joined in 2010, shortly after opening.

The practice is small: just 1,200 square feet with 1 exam lane. The doctors have set up a kind of tag-team process, where Dr. Hollis conducts the refraction and other clinical testing, starts the dilation process, and then hands the patient off to the medically oriented Dr. Kardani, who completes the exam in the exam room. Two opticians manage the handoff to the dispensary for eyewear selection and contact lenses, and a front desk staff person handles phone calls, greeting patients, and starting them on insurance paperwork. Drs. Hollis and Kardani manage everything else.

Their system received 2 major boosts in 2013 when they decided to purchase a Heidelberg SPECTRALIS OCT at The Exchange in Las Vegas and added a Marco EPIC 5100 autorefraction system a few months later. "We wanted to see if we could pick up 1 or 2 more patients a day to increase our efficiency," Dr. Hollis says. They achieved that – increasing their daily patient load from an average of 7.5 patients per day in 2013 to about 10 a day so far in 2014. "If you save several minutes with each patient per day, you find an hour," he says.

Both doctors feel the increase in efficiency. Dr. Hollis says that now that he is not manually entering refraction data into the ExamWRITER system, he already saves valuable minutes with each patient. With the clinical data he can provide to his wife from the OCT images, she is able to conduct a more focused exam. While they have defined categories of care, if Dr. Kardani is running a little longer with a patient in the exam room, Dr. Hollis can obtain a little more history or have a discussion with the patient in the testing area that will help get them back on schedule. Having 2 exam lanes that would allow them to work side by side would be nice, but for now, this system is very thorough. "I'm the best tech she'll ever have," Dr. Hollis says with a laugh.

Their routine also keeps the overhead down because there aren't idle staff members on hand. "With new practices and an unpredictable patient flow, being overstaffed can be an expensive miscalculation," he says. The practice continues to have an increasing number of returning patients and also picks up patients seeking a new practice home after another OD in town closed his practice. Using Websystem3 as a way to keep in contact with existing patients has also helped.

The couple has plans for even more growth. They realize that their small office space can accommodate only so much before it's time to expand to a larger location. "We're young, and we're willing to take some risks," Dr. Hollis says. The savings offered through their Vision Source® membership – not only on major equipment purchases but also on frames, lenses, and contact lenses sold every day – meant that they could add new equipment sooner rather than later.

"Vision Source® has definitely played a role. From our participation in meetings and the savings from vendors, we've been able to get a different perspective and make more purchases than our budget would otherwise have allowed," Dr. Hollis says. "Vision Source® brings processed offers to the table that were compiled by experts. All I have to do is pick and choose what I want, so I can focus on my patients and plans for growth. I can go the Web site, review the vendor discounts, and direct my purchases to those who have the strongest program. I start with the Elite vendors and go from there. Vision Source® has definitely made our startup less bumpy."