

Buy My Specs

Learning to listen and respond effectively to patients is key to selling spectacles, says Pamela Girling. **Emma White** reviews a new guide

It is no longer enough to be a good clinician as an ophthalmic or dispensing optician – you have to be a good sales person as well, says optometrist Pamela Girling, outlining the key message of her guide *Buy My Specs*.

Written with the help of her professional behaviour trainer husband Nick Girling, *Buy My Specs* is a comprehensive yet easy-to-read guide to effective patient and practice team management. The guide is split into 12 easily digestible chapters which act as an 'evolving reference' for readers to return to for practical tips.

Pamela is an optometrist and dispensing graduate of Bradford University with more than 10 years' experience in the optical profession. She currently works as a locum which, she says, provides a great opportunity to observe different practices and working environments. Nick has 20 years of sales and sales training experience and works for the training company Krauthammer International. He has written courses on behavioural communication skills for optometrists, which have been approved for CET points by the General Optical Council and produced a course for dispensing opticians and managers that runs in tandem with the optometry development programme.

Self-awareness

Buy My Specs begins with a chapter on self-awareness and asks practitioners to recognise the importance of their position to get the best out of themselves, their patients and practice. It discusses each stage of the patient journey from the greeting and testing to handover from optometrist to dispenser.

'I believe the first contact with a patient, whether they are well known to you or you have never seen them before in your life, is the cornerstone to a successful examination and a successful dispensing,' she says.

The guide includes handy 'Dos

and Don'ts' tables at the end of each chapter, including one with tips for ensuring patients feel welcomed and common mistakes to avoid.

Girling stresses the necessity for practitioners to communicate with their patients during an examination and explain to them what they will do each step of the way.

'This reassurance is not only to do with the clinical procedure of the test and the patient's medical well-being, they also need to know that they are performing well for you during the examination,' she says.

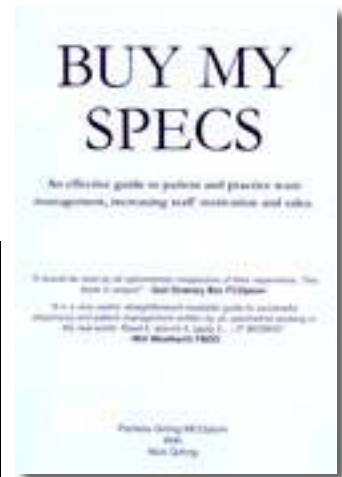
The art of conversation

The conversation practitioners have with their patients at the end of the test is also integral to a successful, mutually satisfying dispensing, continues Girling. Citing her husband's advice she says that key to this part of the patient journey is to ask the right questions and to wait and listen to the answers. Closed questions, which will likely result in monosyllabic answers, should be avoided.

'Deliver the questions in a matter of fact way and with as much empathy as you can. Make it like a conversation rather than an inquisition,' she suggests. Involving the customer in the consultation process is a significant part of the 'handover' from optometrist to dispenser, Girling says.

She advises physically introducing the customer to the dispenser while making recommendations about products and asserting the credibility of the dispenser to them. 'The key here is to create an ethos of security, credibility and involvement. People go ahead with their purchasing decisions when they are comfortable that the recommendations are right for them,' she says.

A chapter devoted to contact lenses argues that the lack of take-up is partly due to patients not being allowed to fully explore the options available. Girling encourages practitioners to help patients overcome their fear, ignorance



and confusion about contact lens wear by fully explaining the benefits. She also advises discussing with patients the circumstances where they wish they didn't have to wear their spectacles and to avoid baffling them with technical knowledge about the lenses.

When handling complaints, Girling suggests three tactics: reassure patients that they are not alone in their concern, make their concern personal to them and to offer a solution. She suggests listening carefully and adopting a matter of fact approach in a relaxed, confident and capable style designed to reassure.

Motivating staff

In a final section – Practice motivation: Getting the best from your team – Girling discusses using effective praise and empowerment through delegation. By sharing tasks and asking staff their opinions about issues affecting the practice, she says it shows respect and trust in their abilities and creates great team spirit.

Buy My Specs offers suggestions and ideas in an informal yet informative style, combining the clinical knowledge of a practitioner with the communication skills of a training specialist. Girling's use of real-life scenarios from practice add character to the guide and make it one that the readers will be able to relate to. And its compact size ensures professionals can keep a copy at hand to refer to whenever they wish. ●

Buy My Specs. Published 2007, 95 pages. By Buy My Specs Publications. www.buymyspecs.com