Questions from the Optical List

This discussion group focuses exclusively on issues relating to Optical Shops. The list is an ASOA member benefit. Sign up today by visiting http://community.asoa.org/ and clicking on “My Subscriptions” to log in with your user name and password. NOTE: You may sign up your optical shop employees—without having them join ASOA—for a low subscription rate of $5 per month. Questions on how to use the service? Email Susan Younker (Susan@asoaa.org).

Q: Who bills vision plans in your office? Do your billers bill VSP/MES or do your opticians?

Answers From Your Peers

- For eight years, the opticians have billed VSP & MES. Our new optical team (one former tech who has her ABOC and has been there eight months and a new optical manager hired in March) are insisting they are too busy and need help since “there’s no time to get anything done.”

  Our lab provided us with an optical consultant specializing in ophthalmology offices, and he says almost all MD offices have their opticians bill because the billers do not know all the lens options and how to bill all the optical line items.

  He also advised that for an office our size (3.5 FTE ophthalmologists and 2 FTE ABOC opticians), we should be handling more than 200 jobs per month. Currently it’s between 130 and 175 (depending on doctors taking vacations). The “duties” he is referring to include the following:

  • Selecting and selling eyewear
  • Dispensing and fitting
  • Reconciling invoices for frames and labs
  • Filing job jackets after dispensing
  • Collecting patient balances and billing VSP/MES
  • Ordering (data entry on lab software and in PM system)

  continued on page 80
continued from page 79

- Follow-ups (tracking jobs, calling patients)
- Housekeeping (removing clutter, straightening work areas, cleaning and stocking frames, unpacking frames and removing boxes)
- Vendor frame selection meetings (and asking the vendors to tag their own frames)
- Keeping department “welcoming,” aesthetically pleasing, and clean

Currently our personnel are creating their own issues. There is a problem with the opticians being “so busy” they can only sell and dispense, but they need help from other departments for data entry, billing, filing, unpacking and tagging frames, calling patients, etc. They are choosing the parts of their job that are convenient for them, the ones they like to do.

I already know what our expert said, now I want to hear it from other offices.

What do you require? How many docs do you have and how many jobs do you have monthly? We are an MD-only office and we ask all our staff to multi-task and work as a team. Am I asking too much, or do I have a couple prima donnas on my hands?

- We get two auths from VSP: one for the exam, one for the materials. The materials are billed by the optical.
- My office situation is very similar to yours. My opticians do all of the duties as you outlined without complaining. I have two offices and two opticals. Each optical has two opticians. One optician is licensed and acts as the department head for both opticals.
- I think it also has to do with how your optical is laid out. Before I came to my practice, optical had one computer shared by three people all clamoring to print super-bills, get auths, and bill optical charges. I pleaded my case to the doctors that there should be two laptops in optical so that the opticians could be billing as they placed the order. Also, it kept them in optical working rather than in the lab and more accessible to patients. Our optical sales have grown exponentially in the past two years—and I have had to add more staff (two FT opticians, two PT opticians, one floater clerical person who is a jack of all trades, and one more optician who is acting as a full-time tech right now). According to John Pinto’s benchmarks for optical sales per FTE, we are exceeding our numbers at this point. I don’t add staff when people say they are too busy —there have to be sales and revenue to justify adding staff.

- In an earlier life I built and managed multiple-site optical dispensaries all of which were associated with physician and OD suites. The optician staff at each site did all of the tasks you described except billing VSP (which was handled by the staff working with the doctors). We did not enter the jobs into a practice management system or order jobs online; we did it all on paper.

The list of tasks you have described is not too much to handle for full-time opticians. In my office we had one physician (who very rarely wrote an Rx) and two part-time ODs—thus fewer FTEs than you have. We could knock out 200+ sales/ dispensions per month.

If you are working 22 days a month and were to do 225 sales, that would only be 10 per busy day—five per optician. Easy, easy, easy, and lots of time left over for the other administrative tasks on your list.

If your two opticians are only doing 175 jobs per month then that’s about four per optician per day. What are they doing when they’re not face-to-face with patients?

It starts with the lead (managing) optician. If that person is not self-driven, then the problems you describe are a natural consequence (a domino effect) of laziness and excuses. To paraphrase Yoda: “There is no can’t, just won’t.”

Answer From an Expert, Arthur De Gennaro:

The comments in the last response are well-taken. There are some circumstances, however, that would cause opticians to complain that they are too busy. Three come to mind:

1. If an optician encounters 10 customers but only closes six sales, he or she would expend a lot of time but generate no revenue.

2. Another is a high number of remakes. In this case customers keep returning for service. This eats up valuable time that could be used for selling.

3. Antiquated systems also chew up time. Using a procedure that worked when business was half of what it is now may no longer be a workable solution. Updating and streamlining procedures is a necessary part of business life, as you well know.

I’d be interested to hear your thoughts on the above: Is your dispensary suffering from a substandard selling effort, excessive remakes, or outdated systems?