

Transcript Details

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Elevate the Patient and Practice Experience | AACO Annual Conference 2024

Maria Sampalis:

Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Dr. Maria Sampalis. I am thrilled to be facilitating today's panel brought to you by Alcon and Modern Optometry in recognition of ASSIST, an exclusive partnership program with Alcon to provide resources and support to independent leaseholders like you. To supplement the insightful program from AACO has in store for you this weekend, this lunch session will focus on optimizing patient experience to leave you an actual strategy to incorporate into your practice management.

Maria Sampalis:

As a corporate optometrist myself with two Warby Parker sub-leases, I'm excited to be joined by fellow independent corporate optometrists. The panel today is very diverse and to join me is Dr. Britt Gustafson of Walmart Vision. She brings 23 years of experience running her practice out of suburbs of Minneapolis. We also have Dr. Maurice Wilson, who has been affiliated with Walmart for 24 years practicing out of two sub-leases in Texas, and Dr. Glenda Aleman, who has been a technician with Walmart 24 years ago and has since received her OD degree by running her corporate practice out of Miami since 2017. So thank you all for joining the panel today.

Glenda Aleman-Moheeputh:

Thank you, Maria.

Maria Sampalis:

I would like to talk about growth plans in our practices. So I want to start with you, Dr. Britt. What does 2024 look like and what's 2025 look like in your practice to grow?

Britt Gustafson:

So one of the things I'm concentrating on in my practice is bringing new patients into the office. I track how many established patients and new patients I see each day, and I aggregate that data, look at it for trends over the month and the year. And ideally, I'd like to have about 30% to 35% new patients, but that number really changed during COVID. During COVID, we were down to about 14% new patients, so I feel really great about my established patients wanting to come back to see me, but that means I'm not reaching a new audience. So I'm really focusing on driving new patients to the practice and tracking that. Currently, I'm at 20% new patients, so I have been able to move the needle on that.

Britt Gustafson:

One of the things I'm doing is really trying to empower my optical staff. I want them to be empowered to schedule patients for what they need when they need it. When a new patient calls my office with a red eye or flashes and floaters, to me, that's such a great opportunity to make an impact on that patient and be there for them in their time of need, and I really want to make that a seamless experience. So I'm really working with my opticians to help them be strong at triaging calls, knowing when to schedule that patient so it minimally disrupts my schedule for my other scheduled patients, but gets that patient in and hopefully captures that patient so that they'll become a member of my practice as well.

Maria Sampalis:

I want to transfer it over to you, Maurice. I know a lot of corporate optometrists have multiple subleases. You have two. What does your growth plan look like for multiple subleases, and what are some strategies and opportunities and challenges that you face?

Maurice Wilson:

So the two offices I have, one's very established, I've had it for almost 25 years, and the second office is a smaller office, and it's newer.

So there are two different strategies completely, and we can't apply one to both offices because they're so different. So the older established practice, we have plenty of patients, and we're always booked, and that's a nice problem to have. So our growth strategy for that office is to increase dollar per patient value. We can't see any more bodies than we see, but we can make them more valuable. So we do that through contact lens fittings, medical testing, things like that. So that's one of our growth strategies for our established office. More of that brings in more dollar per patient.

Maurice Wilson:

The other office, we have a problem of no one knows we're there, so that's a huge different growth strategy. So we're just trying to get our name out, get the community around us to know that we're actually a doctor there at that new Walmart, and it's a more difficult office to get people to come to because it's in a kind of an affluent area, and that typically doesn't mean people just go down to the Walmart and get it. In smaller towns, like you all know, that's the center of the universe, but in this, it's kind of like, "I don't know if I don't go down there," and they don't want to go to the doctor at Walmart. So that's our strategy is we're trying to get our name out there, to get known, and let them know that we have some very high-tech things, and we can do high end eye care.

Maria Sampalis:

Glenda, you're actively growing your practice, so what are some quantifiable goals that you measure against?

Glenda Aleman-Moheeputh:

So my growth plan I feel is like a hybrid of both Britt and my colleague here. So as everybody, we start the new year with new resolutions and are personal, and I also do the same thing in my business. So I started the new year 2024 personally saying I want to spend more time with family and friends, and in my business, I had a business growth plan to increase my revenue by 30%. And in that plan, and one thing why we don't falter with resolutions is because we don't develop a plan to implement it. So I developed my plan, and my plan was literally a hybrid of what they said. Number one was to increase the services that we're doing in our office, so maximizing the dollars per patient, and the other one was to increase the number of new patients that we are seeing.

Glenda Aleman-Moheeputh:

So when I started to think about how am I going to increase my revenue by 30%, I was thinking to bring in a whole new specialty. I was thinking, "Oh, you know what? Maybe I should do dry eye, maybe I should do this, I should do that." I already do a lot of myopia management, which is great, but I was thinking of bringing in a whole new specialty. And then I took a step back, and I'm like, "Wait a minute. Before I go in and invest a lot of money on this dry eye equipment, which is crazy expensive," and if you're doing that, more power to you, "but I like to stay in my realm of myopia management." So when I really looked more into what we were doing in my specific Walmart location in Miami, I realized that my contact lens patients are actually, it was very, very small. The majority of my patients were not actually doing contact lens fittings.

Glenda Aleman-Moheeputh:

So for me, I quickly realized, I was like, "Oh, my gosh. I'm missing such a huge opportunity." And I realized that without having to spend extra money and incur another debt, I could just focus on converting my patients to get more contact lens fittings. So that was one of my strategy. And the other one was just by growing the dollar per patient, as Maurice said, so increasing that. Then I looked into my equipment. I already have a lot of special equipment. I have an OCT, I have a topographer, and I have a wide-field retina cameras. So I realized that a lot of times, we have all these amazing equipment in our offices, but we're not maximizing the use. So I decided to focus on that. I talked to my associate doctor, for those of you who have associate doctors, talk to them, because associate feeling doctors, they love to refer.

Glenda Aleman-Moheeputh:

So I'm like, "We have all the specialized equipment. Let's keep our glaucoma suspects in-house, let's keep our central serous patients in-house. We have the equipment, we can monitor these patients efficiently." And then I educated her on having new technology contact lenses, and I said, "Look, let's offer these to our patients." So for our contact lens conversions, I'm going to give you three tips. What we started doing is mentioning contact lens exams at the time of the appointment, then reinforcing it when the patient comes into the office, and lastly, I reinforced it when they're sitting in my chair. And if they decide not to do the contact lens at that moment, I let them know that they have a grace period where they can come back and just pay the difference for the contact lens fitting.

Maria Sampalis:

Oh, those are some great points. Thank you so much. Increase at 30% is a big goal.

Glenda Aleman-Moheeputh:

I'm happy to say that we are on track so far. We're hitting that 30% goal.

Maria Sampalis:

That's great. It creates some great points on conversion and hidden revenue in your practice. A lot of us don't realize we can increase revenue with just fitting specialty contact lens, daily lenses, things like that in our practice because it increases retention, positive reputation, referrals in our practice. It's been a great way to keep patients in our chairs. I want to ask Dr. Britt, how are you leveraging contact lens conversions to contribute to overall health in your practice?

Britt Gustafson:

I think to echo what Glenda said, it's so important that our patients have a great experience when they come into our offices. That's all of our goals to provide each patient with a great experience. And at the end of the day, I really want to wow my patients with, number one, my sparkling personality, number two, my excellent clinical skills, and number three, my technology. But I know intellectually at the end of the day, what reflects upon me the most is the product the patient interacts with every day. So if they're unhappy with their glasses, if they're unhappy with their contact lenses, it would follow in my mind that they'll likely be unhappy with me.

Britt Gustafson:

So I view the products I recommend as my calling card, and to that end, I have always made daily disposables a priority in my practice. I wear daily disposables. I think every patient deserves to try daily disposables. I very much shied away from daily disposables as a new practitioner 23 years ago, which was a huge miss on my part. Now, my practice is about 70% to 75% single-use daily lenses, and I think that provides that best patient experience.

Britt Gustafson:

The other thing I like to do is a lot of multifocal contact lenses. That technology is heavily underutilized in the marketplace. I practice in a suburb of Minneapolis. I have six offices. Other optometry offices within one mile of my office, so I have plenty of competition from very excellent doctors, and that one thing, the multifocal contact lenses, I think can really help separate me from my competition. So that's one thing I like to do. And how I've leveraged the Water Innovations technology is that's really given me the tools in my toolbox I need to uncover a patient's true wearing experience.

Britt Gustafson:

When I started practicing 23 years ago, I think I would ask patients, "Tell me how things are going with your contacts," and if they said, "Fine," I was like, "Great. We're good," because I didn't have a lot of technology to make a big change in what they had. But when water surface lenses came out, water surface technology really gave me the leverage and leeway to ask more probing questions. So now, I like to ask patients two questions. I say, "Tell me how things are going with your contacts," and that gives me their perception. And then I follow that up and say, "What time of day are your contacts dry?" That gives me their reality.

Britt Gustafson:

One of the first patients I ask the questions to in this manner was a patient who had been refit into single-use contacts the year prior, so he was back for a re-exam. So I asked him the first question, "Tell me how things are going with your contacts." And he was really jumping out of the chair. He said, "They're perfect. I love them. They're terrific." And so being a chair time-minded OD, I kind of thought, "Do I ask the follow-up question? What time do they dry out?" He just told me they're perfect. But I'm also an optometrist who loves a routine, so I asked the follow-up question, "Tell me what time your contacts dry out." And he paused for a minute, and he reached in his pocket, and he pulled out another pair of lenses, and he said, "Oh, at 3 o'clock every day, I switch my lenses." That was perfect. He loves them.

Britt Gustafson:

So that really showed me how I can impact a patient in a positive way. So that patient was moved to Dailies Total 1, he doesn't have to switch his contacts in the middle of the day, and to me, that demonstrates the difference between cost and value. Had I asked that patient how his contacts are and he said perfect, and I made a recommendation at that point, that would've seemed kind of arbitrary. But because I asked the second question, and he told me he was having a concern, that he's switching his lenses at 3:00, then I could make a tailored recommendation and say, "When you said you're switching your contacts every day at 3:00, I have a contact that I think you can wear comfortably the whole day." That's value, and so that's how I've leveraged the portfolio in my practice.

Maria Sampalis:

Yeah, that's some great advice, Dr. Britt. Dispensing is very important to make a recommendation and have patients follow up. I want to know what Dr. Maurice does for his strategy and for his goals for his two practices.

Maurice Wilson:

So I look at it at two ways is I look at the practice as being half-medically-oriented. So we have all the equipment to do that, and we show all of the exams and all the equipment tests in the rooms to each patient every single time and explain in detail. Even if they don't understand, that's okay, but I think the doctor explaining to them in a very technical way kind of impresses them with their doctor. And so

they tend to trust, and they do, and they'll follow your advice better. And they come back, because the best thing I can hear in our practice is, "No one ever told me that before. No one ever showed me that before." That's music to my ears. Then I know we're doing the right thing. And they want to come back, and I tell their friends, "Oh, that doctor did this, he told me that," and that's how we can help grow our practice.

Maurice Wilson:

The other thing is with Water Innovations contact lenses, we make that our lens of choice in our office, and to me, it's not a burden switching everybody out of their older lenses into the newer technology. It's an opportunity.

Maria Sampalis:

Yeah, thank you so much. The technology out there is making our patients' experience better, makes our goals attainable. But tell us how you define patient experience in your practice.

Britt Gustafson:

In my practice, I was at a meeting this many years ago, it was probably 2005. I was a relatively new practitioner at that time, and a doctor by the name of Charlie Bailey was speaking. And he said something that to this day, I think of every day I'm in my office, and I don't know if Charlie came up with this, but I'm going to give him credit for it. He said, "Patients don't care until they know that you care," and that just resonates with me so deeply, because if patients don't feel like we're invested in them as a human being, I think they're not going to be invested in us. So I train all of my staff that I want each and every patient who walks out of our office to walk out feeling better.

Britt Gustafson:

Sometimes, that means they feel a little bit better. Maybe they just wanted to chat with us or vent about their day, that's fine. Maybe they feel a lot better, that they know they don't have glaucoma or they know they don't have a retinal detachment or they know that they're confident they have a new contact lens that will get them through their full day. So I really want patients to just walk out feeling better.

Britt Gustafson:

One thing I do is I utilize my own technicians in my practice to help streamline the patient experience. Then if I have an add-on patient, it doesn't disrupt the schedule. And like Maury was saying, I like to integrate technology. I use wide-field retinal imaging and OCT to help educate patients, which has just been a huge help. I was just telling a patient yesterday, "I can't imagine the days when I practice without those tools." So that's been very helpful to myself and my patients.

Maria Sampalis:

Technology, doctor-patient relationship, they're all important for the patient experience. If a patient's happy, then they'll refer more patients. Tell us about how that works for practice when they walk out.

Britt Gustafson:

So when patients walk out, I have a program through my website that I can text patients a request for a Google review, so I can have them auto sent or I can control who gets those. So I will send those out at the end of the day, and so they'll get a text or an email asking for a Google review, and that's been super helpful in driving new patients to my practice. When I have a new patient in the chair, I always ask them how they learned about me or my office. I would say about 60% of patients say Google, and about 30% will say word of mouth, and maybe 10% will say, "You were on my insurance panel, and I Googled you." So Google's been very big. And so that's one of my priorities this year is growing my Google Reviews. I started that about a year-and-a-half ago. So I had 28 reviews a year-and-a-half ago, and now we're just over 200. But having patients testimonials about my practice is so powerful.

Maria Sampalis:

[inaudible 00:17:42] word of mouth referrals. I want to ask you, Maurice, 24 years in the same location, very successful practice. Give us some insight on how the great experience works in your practice.

Maurice Wilson:

So we were talking about this last night, and we're saying that the great experience is when they can see out of their glasses properly. So I always ask, a new patient comes to practice, I go, "How are you doing with your glasses?" And almost invariably, they'll say, "Oh, I hate these things. They never work," and something like that, and now they're at a different office. So that's like tuned my mind into saying that's the one thing you have to get right is that refraction, and you have to do it intensely, because that's the reason they're there, unless their eye's hanging out of their head or something. Most of the time, that's why that patient came to you, because they hated the last glasses or prescription they had.

Maurice Wilson:

And so that's what we really focus on at patient experience is number one, they have to have the best visual outcome we can possibly give them. Then we can treat their glaucoma and treat their macular degeneration, do all that kind of fun stuff. But somehow, that's not as important to the patients as that good pair of glasses. So I think that's what we really focus on a lot in our office is growth.

Maurice Wilson:

I'm going to tell a story. So we had to laugh about Google reviews earlier, and so I just hired a new receptionist, she's 19 years old, and she said, "Oh, you should see the Google Reviews." I went, "What's that? We have Google reviews?" She goes, "Oh, no. You should see it. Yeah, they're really good." And I went, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, what does that mean?" She showed them to me, and I went, "Oh, my gosh. People actually do that. They say that about us?" And then she goes, "Oh, you should see it back a few years ago. They really didn't like that other receptionist." And I went, "I had no idea." And she goes, "And now with the newer receptionists, everything's good." I went, "I had no idea people were trashing us online, because our receptionist was being mean to them." Because I'm in the back working, and they're at the front, and so you don't know.

Maurice Wilson:

So the Google Reviews has become a brand new thing for us that we actually know about. So now, we are actually telling people, "Hey, give us a review," whereas a year ago, I didn't know they existed even. So it's good learning. You can always learn something new.

Maria Sampalis:

Always learn something new.

Maurice Wilson:

Absolutely.

Maria Sampalis:

[inaudible 00:20:08] business and staying up to date on trends. I know, Glenda, you're very innovative in optometry. What does any technology contact lens category that you introduced to your patients to increase the patient experience?

Glenda Aleman-Moheeputh:

So I am very, very innovative. Thank you for that. However, I feel so ashamed. Because I just missed the Millennial generation by a little bit. And these two here have way, way more Google's Review than I do. So I am so embarrassed. So I have a total of seven Google Reviews, so that is one of my goals right now is to increase my Google Reviews after meeting them, but they're great reviews. Yes, so going back to your question, I do love to introduce new technology. I think it's very important. And going back to what Maurice and Britt said, it's very important not only to give my patients a great experience, but I like to give my patients a unique experience. Because every place, every vendor where we go, everybody's trying to give us a great experience, that's great, but people remember something unique.

Glenda Aleman-Moheeputh:

I was an optician and a technician. I've done every role in the eye care industry. I started as a tech optician, Vision Center manager. For those of you Walmart doctors, Walmart doctors here, so I was a Vision Center manager. I was one of the best ones because I wanted to be an optometrist, so I treated my doctors really, really well. So going back to the question, I think introducing new technologies is great so we can give the patient that unique experience, giving them that great experience. And I don't want to be the doctor that forgot to tell them about this new lens that they might've seen an ad on TV or they went home, and their friends is raving about the great lens that they have. And then they're like, "Oh, my doctor didn't tell me."

Glenda Aleman-Moheeputh:

So I always wanted to make sure that I don't leave anything out from telling my patients. I want to offer them and treat them like loyalty, because it's like when you go shopping for a car and they see the way that you're dressed and they're automatically going to take you to the economy cars. But then wouldn't you like to test drive that luxury model? Don't you feel great when you can drive it? So I like to give all my patients that experience.

Glenda Aleman-Moheeputh:

So we have not only in the technology, the service that I offer, and taking my time with refraction, I know how those prescriptions work because I was an optician, I was on the other side, but also making my practice very, very welcoming to them. We have snacks for my patients. We have coffee, we have drinks. We have decorated. If you came into my Walmart, you won't even know you're in a Walmart. So that's the way that I like to also give them a unique experience. I learn from Emily in Paris. You got to stimulate all the senses, so I have some Emily in Paris new season. So I like to have something that smells great also. So I have a diffuser with lemongrass, that's our signature smell in our Walmart location.

Glenda Aleman-Moheeputh:

New technology is amazing. Patients, the comfort that these lenses provide at the end of the day is priceless. And one more thing, I love how she goes back 25 years ago and remember something that a doctor said here. So we got this stage, and this is a privilege. I would be so honored and grateful if one of you can remember one thing any of us said here today. One thing I like to give you is that do not underestimate your patients, your Walmart patients, because this is something that I hear a lot. "Oh, no. I'm in Walmart, and my Walmart patient won't pay for that. My Walmart patient doesn't have the money to do this." No, I disagree with you. I'm in Miami in Hialeah. I work with hardworking immigrant patients, and those patients, because they work so hard, they want the best for them. So I will tell you, do not judge the patient. You give the patient the best options and let them make the decision.

Maria Sampalis:

Thank you so much. The true thing here is we know the impact and recognize the impact that digital's made in our lives and in our businesses. I want to start with Dr. Britt. You have 200 Google reviews, and that's great. Tell us about that strategy and how that's going to contribute into your overall practice goals.

Britt Gustafson:

So that's something, the Google Reviews are generated through my website. So I do have a website that's updated regularly, and I work with the website company. They do posts onto my Google profile, and that helps optimize my search, or it makes my search engine optimization better. I learned this term, SEO, all of my Google rankings because you want more traffic, more clicks to put your page on the front or first page when people Google "eye doctor" in my area. So my website company helps me with that, and they also have the platform for the Google Reviews.

Britt Gustafson:

In addition to that, I have online scheduling to meet patients where they are for their schedule. So if they think, "Oh, I need to schedule an eye exam at 10 o'clock at night," they can get online and book that exam with my office, and that's been a huge driver of patients. We've done that for many years. The first patient that booked online was 82 years old, so we were very impressed with her. So maybe she should be your receptionist, Maury.

Maurice Wilson:

She'll probably know more.

Britt Gustafson:

So it's been a really fun way to engage patients. And then with that scheduling, we have a two-way text platform. So if patients need to reschedule their appointment, they can simply text us. We've found texting has been huge in communicating with patients, and of course, we want to know if that patient needs to reschedule, then we know that slot is open. That decreases our no-show rate, and then we can rebook that slot and optimize our revenue and efficiency within our practice.

Maria Sampalis:

Glenda, how do you utilize digital marketing tools in your practice?

Glenda Aleman-Moheeputh:

I do not. Do you hear my Google Reviews? I have seven.

Maria Sampalis:

[inaudible 00:26:48] you making it better? What is your strategy?

Glenda Aleman-Moheeputh:

So I mean yes, there's always a work in progress, and recognizing I make progress because I know my weakness, and I'm working on that. Luckily, you guys are going to learn something, a program that Alcon is working on, or am I too early to say something? But I'm definitely looking forward to that, because right now, my biggest thing for marketing is word of mouth, which we cannot discount word of mouth. So going back to my growth plan, I blatantly ask my happy patients for referrals. I said, "You know what? Send me a patient," when they're like, "Oh, my gosh. What can I do? I'm so happy with you." I'm like, "This is the best thing you can do for me," is I give them a few business cards, and I ask them to refer patients to me.

Glenda Aleman-Moheeputh:

So digital marketing, I think that it's extremely important. When I tell my kids, "We're going to go on a trip, we're going to go here," they come back within five minutes, and they have, "These are the best restaurants, these are the best places," because this is how the new generation works. Not just the new generation, but she said she has an 84-year-old patient who made an appointment online. So I think this is just the way that things are now. The environment has shifted, and we definitely need to maximize our digital outreach.

Glenda Aleman-Moheeputh:

So at the moment, Maria, honestly, I'm underutilizing digital marketing. I did just sign up, can we say it, for ASSIST? And ASSIST was literally a beautiful thing for me, because I realized that I'm missing a huge opportunity on digital marketing. I need to be present. I think I'm an awesome doctor, my staff is amazing, we have a beautiful office, and yet nobody would find us online because our SEO is terrible. We have a barely functional website. So having a program like ASSIST come in where they're making digital marketing accessible to doctors like me, who are not the most tech-savvy and also who do not have huge, I didn't have a huge budget for marketing. It's very expensive. All those digital ads cost a lot of money. So I'm super excited to be signing up for ASSIST, because they're going to have a digital ad campaign along with the co-app where they're going to be using a one mailer. So I think I went ahead of myself, but it's because I'm so excited. This was really an answer to my prayers.

Maria Sampalis:

That's a great program. And for the learning curve, Maurice, for your practice, what have you experienced with challenges with optimizing digital initiatives in your practice?

Maurice Wilson:

Well, the challenge is not knowing what digital things are. That's one of our challenges. So we started something about a year ago that I guess you could call it digital in that patient appointment reminders. That's always a big thing. You got to remind them, or they'll no show, they'll forget, they're busy. And so for years and years, we would have somebody calling every single patient to remind them of every single appointment on the phone. And we found that little by little, people were not answering their phones, more and more, and so they would get frustrated. "Well, I left voicemail, I left a voicemail, I left a voicemail." That's not a communication at all.

Maurice Wilson:

So we finally were told about texting. That's our big digital thing in our office. So we started texting everybody to remind them of their appointments, and in the text we say, "And here's the phone number. Call us if you have to reschedule, if you can't make it." And so that's been a huge benefit for us. And we saw our no-show rate go way down, and people are showing up, and they like getting reminded by the text. It's a positive thing. So that was something, I didn't think it was that powerful, but it truly is amazingly powerful.

Maurice Wilson:

And then for our newer office, that is, we're just trying to build it up, it's about two miles away from Exxon's World Headquarters in Houston. And so every patient that comes in there is an engineer of some kind, so they're very savvy. And so I thought the new ASSIST program you were talking about, having the digital ASSIST from them is going to be huge for that office, because those people will respond to that immediately. So that's exciting growth plans for us by using the Alcon program for that new office, especially for those patients.

Maria Sampalis:

Britt, you've been very proactive and advanced in your marketing. What have been some challenges as you've been more in that corner than the other doctors?

Britt Gustafson:

Right. I think I've had the communication down with the patient, so we do text reminders like Maury does and have seen a positive impact on our schedule as far as reducing no shows. But I know I can do more, because we're communicating with our existing patients, but we're not reaching new patients. And there are a lot of doctors probably Glenda's age that do a great job on TikTok and Instagram, and I kind of get overwhelmed by that a little bit, I'll have to admit. "Do I have to start filming these videos? Nobody wants to see me dance on Instagram, I promise." So I get a little bit overwhelmed with that.

Britt Gustafson:

And I think within my practice, fortunately I'm usually busy, and then I don't really think about marketing when I'm busy because I'm busy. And then I have a couple slow days, and I start to think, "Oh, I need to market the practice and get the word out," but I don't even know where to start. As Glenda mentioned, it's quite expensive to do digital marketing. There are a lot of different vendors for that. So to go through all of that gets kind of overwhelming for me. And anything that takes me out of the exam lane with the patient essentially subtracts revenue from my practice. So with that mindset, I kind of have analysis paralysis, essentially, on making any decisions on moving forward with what the next step is.

Maria Sampalis:

Yeah, I think these are all great points on what optometrists face every day in their practice. It's very costly. It takes a lot of time. It takes away from our patients. It's a learning curve. So those are all great points. So I'd like to shift that over the years, which [inaudible 00:33:16] started was transitioning to ASSIST by outcome, which each of you have registered and you're familiar with. So for those of

you in the audience, ASSIST is a comprehensive integrated program designed to empower ODs and transform the patient experience by supporting unique needs for independent lease-holder [inaudible 00:33:34].

Maria Sampalis:

This program provides education and valuable resources within the VIP Clubhouse, such as fitting guides, product comparison sheets to facilitate patient interactions. Under ASSIST, there is also co-op marketing programs available to promote your practice with tactics like mobile ads, direct mailers, and social media. Each of you have a one-pager in front of you with details and a QR code to register for free, which I invite you to do as well. So we kind of touched on this a little bit, but Dr. Britt, based on your experience, how do you envision utilizing the program to support your practice?

Britt Gustafson:

I'm super excited about ASSIST, and when I learned about that, it's kind of like somebody just invented the perfect thing to solve my problem. So I've already signed up to send out the direct mailers, so 200 mailers will go out at the beginning of September, I believe, two patients that are known contact lens wearers that live near my practice. And I always enjoy when patients come in educated, so they'll have some experience and exposure to a specific lens product, and that makes the conversion that much easier, because they come in with that familiarity, and they're excited about it. And so I can echo that excitement and I think that creates a really streamlined experience for patients.

Britt Gustafson:

Additionally, the digital ads really elevate the technological aspect of my practice. I really want to take my marketing efforts to the next level, and ASSIST will help me do that. And when I signed up for ASSIST, it took me five minutes. Thankfully, the financial investment is quite minimal, and then I'll be able to monitor the impact as the campaign rolls on, which I'm really looking forward to.

Maria Sampalis:

Great. For Maurice, your practice is really thriving on word of mouth referrals. How does ASSIST help you with your goals?

Maurice Wilson:

So one thing the ASSIST program is giving us for our practices, our patient education handouts. And I'm really excited about that, because I'm all about patient education. I want them to be educated about what's wrong with their eyes, what's possible about their eyes, and these handouts that are part of the ASSIST program that we can hand each patient, I think that creates more word of mouth, because they're going to go home with something physical in their hand that the doctor gave them, and it's about their eyes and it's going to be something they might hand to a friend or keep at the family or at the house. It'll have our name on it. It's going to be just great. So I'm really excited about the patient education part of it in the office.

Maria Sampalis:

Glenda, I know you're very enthusiastic about ASSIST. Can you just give us some closing remarks on anything else?

Glenda Aleman-Moheeputh:

Absolutely. So to be fair, I want to clarify that I am moving forward and making significant changes in my practice. I'm transitioning to a new EMR that will allow me to have all the great things these two amazing doctors mentioned. So we will have texting reminders, we will have online appointments, and even medical billing directly through it. I have no idea how to do medical billing, so I'm talking to my friend over there later. But ASSIST, like I mentioned, one thing, though, in my area, I'm in the middle of Hialeah, and this is another thing I would say, know your demographics.

Glenda Aleman-Moheeputh:

So my patients are actually just like me. They're not the most tech-savvy, so they're not like your Enron patients. So mine, like I said, they're immigrants, they're hardworking people. They work in the service industry. And for me, one of the things that I'm really excited, yes, I'm excited about the digital ads just because I want to be up-to-date with everybody else, and also I can reach additional audience, but my main patients, actually, I'm super excited for the one mailer, the one-page mailer, because they are more hands-on. When they get this promotional thing on their mail, and it invites them to my practice, I know that for me, specifically, that's going to work amazing by bringing me new patients.

Glenda Aleman-Moheeputh:

I love the patient educational piece because it allows me to delegate in Walmart. The reality is that sometimes we get really, really busy, it's very overwhelming. So having something that a picture says 1,000 words that I can delegate to one of my staff and say, "Oh, I want you to talk to this patient about this specific product, so why don't you go into this other room?" And then they can show them graphics on what it is that we want to teach them. So I think that brings immense value to the practice. And again, it's actually something I can afford.

Glenda Aleman-Moheeputh:

And then another thing is when I was doing my due diligence and investigating about marketing is that these agencies are asking me for a lot of money, but then they're like, "And I'm going to need you to give me the content. So you're going to go to your practice, do this video, record yourself saying this." And like she said, I hate recording myself. There's nothing worse than me making a video of myself. Oh, my gosh. It gives me the chills. So I'm like, "I don't want to do that." So this program, it's turnkey ready. They're going to do it all for me, and it's extremely affordable. It's not even one patient. It's like half of a patient. It's just like one retina image will pay for it. So I think it's amazing. I'm super excited for it.

Maria Sampalis:

Thank you all for joining the panel today and providing valuable perspectives on how corporate optometrists optimize their practice and patient experience.