

REVIVE YOUR LASIK VOLUME

Pointers to help keep your laser refractive surgery center viable.

BY ROBERT EDWARD ANG, MD



It is clear that having a LASIK practice is not as high-profile a position as it was 10 years ago. In my opinion, the most significant reason LASIK seems to have lost its luster is an overabundance of LASIK clinics serving each market. As increasing numbers of surgeons and centers have begun offering the same refractive surgery services, prices have declined and the quality of surgical outcomes has become inconsistent. For those who offer LASIK, it is a challenge to keep your practice profitable. This article describes some initiatives we undertook to keep our LASIK center viable.

WORTHWHILE INITIATIVES

Analysis. Start by studying your market. Analyze the age and social status of your patients and the services they have availed themselves of at your clinic for the past 5 to 10 years. Knowing where you are now will help you plan for the future. I work in a subspecialty-based surgery center that offers the full range of ophthalmic services. In an analysis of patients at our center over the past 13 years, we found that more than 67% of patients coming for consults were 40 years of age and older.

Diversification. Not all patients will qualify for LASIK, or they may not want to undergo LASIK because of bad publicity they have read. A successful clinic must offer a complete range of refractive surgery options, including PRK, phakic IOLs, and refractive lens exchange with premium lenses. Another service that may set you apart is a presbyopia-correcting refractive surgical procedure. Our clinic offers Supracor LASIK (Bausch + Lomb Technolas) to presbyopic hyperopes and myopes, and also to post-LASIK patients. The availability of Supracor has helped us extend the range of LASIK treatments to include the over-40 age group.

Quality. Keeping your equipment well-maintained and surgeons proficient will ensure that the quality of your outcomes remains consistent. Good surgical outcomes will improve your reputation and allow you to increase your prices or keep them higher than that of other practices.

Pricing. Rationalize your pricing policy. Having a higher price than your competitors is not necessarily a bad thing. Along with good surgical outcomes and a solid reputation, pricing yourself at a premium over competitors can help to solidify your place in the market. If you decide to go this route, do not buckle at the first sign of a down month or year.

Awareness. Your postoperative patients are your brand ambassadors. Maintaining contact with them through yearly follow-up can refresh their minds regarding how happy they are with the results of their LASIK treatments. It also gives you an opportunity to remind them to talk about their results with friends and relatives.

The Internet is another indispensable tool. Make sure you have a website that has enough information about you and your practice and an easy way of setting an appointment. Traditional media can be helpful as well; we maintain regular appearances on a television medical show that allows us to showcase and discuss our offerings in ophthalmology. It may be worthwhile in the long run to have a marketing consultant or an employee devoted to marketing efforts in order to keep patients walking in the door.

PERSPECTIVE

Reviving a center's LASIK volume may be easier said than done. However, even if volume cannot be restored to previous levels, it can be helpful to see things from a different perspective. Specifically, in a multi-subspecialty practice like ours, it is helpful to see the refractive surgery clinic as part of the whole.

We have professional managers running the operations of our surgery center. They evaluate each service as a product and determine which specialties and procedures are profitable and which are not, regardless of the personalities in the practice. Their sole purpose is to analyze profit and loss—preferably profit. They then allocate resources, personnel,

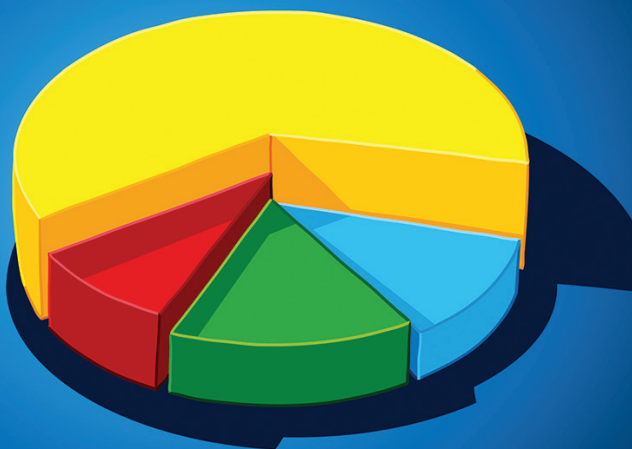


AT A GLANCE

- Analyzing the age and social status of your patients and the services they have availed themselves of at your clinic for the past 5 to 10 years can be helpful in keeping one's LASIK center viable.
- A successful clinic must offer a complete range of refractive surgery options, including LASIK, PRK, phakic IOLs, and refractive lens exchange with premium lenses.
- Along with good surgical outcomes and a solid reputation, pricing yourself at a premium over competitors can help to solidify your place in the market.
- Referrals between and among subspecialties are a must.

A PART OF THE WHOLE

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Referrals between and among subspecialties are also a must. For example, the cataract or retina surgeons can refer to us the children of their patients who are interested in LASIK. Conversely, I can help them troubleshoot unhappy patients after cataract surgery with premium lenses by offering a corneal touchup procedure. Cooperation, rather than competition, helps everyone.

CONCLUSION

At our facility, LASIK remains profitable, but it is no longer the main profit center. We have come to accept this as the norm, and, after making some of the adjustments described above, we are more than happy to keep it this way. ■

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