



Patients are the heroes of their health journeys and should be active partners in their care, not passive recipients.

BY AMANDA CARDWELL CARONES, MPH, AND FRANCESCO CARONES, MD

The COVID-19 pandemic spurred a shift from patient-centered care to participatory medicine, a model in which patients are not merely recipients but active participants in their health journey.

This change has had a significant impact on specialized practices like ours, Advalia Vision, a boutique refractive surgery center. *Patient-centered care* and *participatory medicine* are more than just buzzwords; they are central to our practice's philosophy. We strive to provide a personalized experience that empowers each patient to take control of their vision. Our patients seek not only medical solutions but also care that aligns with their lifestyle and personal preferences. By incorporating these principles into every step of the patient journey, we have transformed each interaction into a collaborative and meaningful experience.

THE HERO'S JOURNEY IN HEALTH CARE

In a refractive surgery practice, the patient's experience mirrors the narrative archetype of the hero's journey. The patient embarks on a quest to improve their vision and, in turn, their quality of life.

As with any hero's journey, the patient faces challenges—vision problems such as presbyopia that disrupt daily life, frustrations with glasses or contact lenses that limit an active lifestyle, and fears about surgery. Much like Obi-Wan Kenobi guiding Luke Skywalker, the surgeon provides a plan, expert advice, tools, and support to help the patient achieve success.

PARTICIPATORY CARE**What Matters to You?**

Participatory care shifts the question from "What's the matter with you?" to "What matters to you?" This subtle yet powerful change highlights the importance of understanding each patient's personal goals and preferences rather than focusing solely on the clinical aspects of their condition.

Our practice fully embraces this approach. During initial consultations, we take the time to learn about each patient's lifestyle, work, hobbies, and visual frustrations. The conversation extends beyond diagnosing medical issues to understanding what patients value most about their vision. Some prioritize a full range of vision for professional work, whereas others aim to eliminate their need for glasses during sports and outdoor activities.

This personalized approach allows us to tailor treatments to align with each patient's unique goals. Our mission is to help patients not only see better but live better.

A Partnership

Participatory medicine fosters a partnership between the health care provider and the patient, with both parties collaborating to make informed decisions. This model has been especially effective in our boutique practice, where the focus is on high-touch, personalized care.

Shared Decision-Making

Our patients are involved in every step of their treatment plan. During consultations, they are encouraged to express their frustrations with their vision and their motivations for seeking correction. This empowers them to make choices that align with their personal values and lifestyle.

Education as Empowerment

We do not present our patients with a menu of options. Instead, we operate under the assumption that, if there

were no additional financial costs or compromises involved, patients would choose the broadest range of vision possible. Our goal is to find the best solution for each individual and clearly describe the visual outcomes they can expect.

Although the surgeon is the expert in ocular health and surgical procedures, patients know their own needs better than anyone else. By explaining possible outcomes—especially using examples of activities important to the patient—our team helps them understand their condition and the potential results of different procedures.

Patients leave the consultation with a clear understanding of their best option and confidence in their decision.

Personalized Care

Boutique practices can offer a level of personalized care that larger, high-volume clinics may struggle to provide. In our experience, this individualized attention not only enhances patient satisfaction but also leads to better outcomes.

No two treatment plans are alike. Every patient undergoes a thorough evaluation that considers their vision goals, lifestyle, and personal preferences. This information informs the development of a customized plan tailored to their specific needs and expectations. For instance, we might recommend an option that minimizes halos and glare for someone who frequently drives at night or a full range focus IOL for a patient who prioritizes more freedom from glasses.

Continuity of Care

Our patients spend about 1 hour with a single technician during their surgical consultation, and whenever possible, they see the same technician for their postoperative checkups. We find that consistent, personalized attention fosters trust and ensures that our patients feel well supported throughout their journey.

BEYOND PATHOLOGY TO PERFORMANCE

We have shifted from a pathology-driven mindset to a performance-driven approach. Whereas traditional care models focus on the problem (ie, pathology), our practice emphasizes enhancing performance by improving patients' quality of life and visual independence.

Understanding Patients' Expectations

Our team looks beyond clinical conditions such as cataract or refractive error to understand what patients expect from their vision after surgery. Adopting a performance-driven approach means our goals are not only to correct pathology but also to help patients achieve the best possible vision for their lifestyle.

Prioritizing Value Over Cost

Each patient visit represents an opportunity for our practice to provide value. By focusing on the long-term benefits of refractive surgery—such as visual freedom and improved quality of life—we position ourselves as partners in the patient's journey rather than merely as a transactional service provider.

CONCLUSION

Patient-centered care and participatory medicine form the foundation of the patient experience at our practice. Our goal is not only to correct vision problems but also to transform patients' lives through thoughtful, personalized care rooted in a true partnership. ■

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