

BUILDING PATIENT TRUST DURING CONSULTATIONS



A clinic's environment, brand identity, and communication strategies work together to contribute to successful consultations.

BY DAVID ANDREU, MD, AND ANJA KAISER, MD



As patients begin their refractive vision correction journey with a particular clinic, myriad factors influence their overall impression and confidence in their choice. A clinic's environment, appearance, and

brand identity play just as vital a role in establishing patients' trust and loyalty as does effective communication. In the examination room, clear and empathetic communication not only helps patients understand their refractive

errors and treatment options, but it also fosters a sense of partnership between eye care providers and their patients. Herein, we describe how we prioritize both visual appeal and effective patient communication in our respective practices.

Clinic Appearance and Brand Identity Matters

DAVID ANDREU, MD

When patients consider refractive surgery and enter the facility for a preoperative consultation, an environment that gives patients a sense of trust and professionalism is paramount. I spearheaded the recent transformation of our clinic as we created a new brand identity and clinic environment. From the moment our patients walk through the door, we want them to feel well taken care of, and this starts with the facility itself. We prioritize every aspect of the clinical environment, from the waiting areas

to the diagnostic equipment, ensuring everything is clean and well maintained. Such attention to detail helps convey a message of high standards of care to our patients. Equally important as the facility itself is the brand identity of the clinic. For 35 years, our brand has been ICO (Instituto Condal de Oftalmología). The focus of our messaging extends beyond the surgery itself to the patient's overall quality of life. Our philosophy is reflected in the clinic's new name, VERTE. In Spanish, "verte" means "to see you,"

which holds multiple connotations. It signifies our commitment to seeing and caring for our patients and fostering a special relationship built on trust and empathy. We communicate this message through a variety of platforms such as email newsletter, Instagram, and in-clinic messaging. For example, we have installed screens in every waiting area to show videos and mini-clips of infographics and testimonials, which allow patients to understand our message while waiting for their consultation.

Prerequisites for a Successful Patient Consultation

DAVID ANDREU, MD, AND ANJA KAISER, MD

To ensure a productive preoperative consultation, patients need to understand the nature of their current refractive errors, such as the combination of myopia and astigmatism. They should also comprehend that the spherical component of their refractive error is influenced by age-related changes and be able to recognize how their age fits into this progression. When patients have a clear grasp of their current refractive condition, they can engage more

meaningfully in the conversation about their care. To facilitate meaningful patient engagement in the conversation, it is important that the surgeon uses simple, clear language and explanations. Beyond this, three key elements significantly enhance the quality of preoperative consultations: empathy, time, and emotional sensitivity.

1. Empathy. Understanding the patient's feelings and motivations is essential for the surgeon. This skill builds trust

and makes patients feel valued and understood, particularly those with fears and anxieties about their refractive condition or surgery.

2. Time. Allocate adequate time to each patient. Whether the patient processes information quickly or slowly, spending the necessary time with them ensures they fully comprehend their condition and the proposed treatment options. This is especially important for patients who may need more reassurance and explanation.

3. Emotional Sensitivity. The provider should be able to read and respond to patients' facial expressions and

body language. They should be skilled at determining whether a patient comprehends the provided information, as

well as whether their concerns are increasing or decreasing, and the surgeon must adjust his or her approach accordingly.

Communication During the Preoperative Consultation

DAVID ANDREU, MD, AND ANJA KAISER, MD

The preoperative consultation is a milestone in a patient's journey toward refractive vision correction. This discussion shapes the patient's experience and decision-making process. Therefore, communication strategies with the patient should be based on three fundamental principles: transparency, clarity, and ethics. These principles form the cornerstone of a patient-centered approach in which every interaction is characterized by honesty, thoroughness, and a commitment to ethical standards.

1. Transparency. It is important for the surgeon to make a strong recommendation regarding the best treatment option for the patient. When presented with a menu of options, patients often have difficulty making a decision. The surgeon must provide the patient with clear, unambiguous information about their treatment options, including detailed explanations about potential risks and benefits. A transparent discussion helps the patient understand the complexities of a procedure without ambiguity or misleading promises, and it empowers them to make informed decisions. One example of transparency that providers can effortlessly implement is to show animations of refractive surgeries, such as the implantation of an EVO ICL™ (STAAR Surgical), to highlight the surgical process and associated risks.

2. Clarity. Clarity goes hand-in-hand with transparency, as surgeons should communicate with patients in a way that is easy to understand. This means avoiding medical and technical jargon and using metaphors to describe surgical procedures and potential outcomes. By using metaphors to explain possible complications such as over- or undercorrection, halos, or glare, patients understand the inherent complexities of the procedure and won't expect absolute outcomes.

3. Ethics. Ethics should underpin every aspect of the preoperative consultation. A refractive surgery is not merely a technical procedure, but a patient-centered endeavor guided by ethical principles. This includes respecting patients' autonomy by presenting all viable options for vision correction, encouraging open dialogue, never pressuring patients into making hasty decisions, and taking their concerns seriously. Promising patients a guaranteed successful outcome is not ethical, and surgeons should emphasize the complexity of refractive surgery and be upfront about its risks, especially regarding irreversible corneal laser procedures.

By prioritizing transparency, clarity, and ethics, surgeons establish a standard of care that goes beyond technical proficiency and cultivates a patient-doctor relationship built on mutual respect and shared decision-making. These

fundamental principles of communication not only enhance patient satisfaction but also ensure that each patient receives a treatment recommendation tailored to his or her individual needs and preferences.

CONCLUSION

The preoperative care and consultation phase is pivotal in the patient's journey toward vision correction. A well-maintained clinic environment and strong brand identity lay the foundation for trust and professionalism. However, the true cornerstone of patient success lies in effective communication. Clear, empathetic, and ethical communication fosters understanding, alleviates anxiety, and builds a robust patient-provider relationship. ■

DAVID ANDREU, MD

- General Director of VERTE Oftalmologia
Barcelona, Spain
- dandreu@verte.es
- Financial disclosure: None

ANJA KAISER, MD

- Augentrum Dresden, Dresden, Germany
- kaiser@augentrum-dresden.de
- Financial disclosure: None

Important Safety Information

Important Safety Information for the EVO/EVO+ ICL

The EVO/EVO+ ICL is indicated for phakic patients 21-60 years of age to correct/reduce myopia up to -20.0 D with up to 6.0 D of astigmatism. Careful preoperative evaluation and sound clinical judgment should be used by the surgeon to decide the risk/benefit ratio before implanting a lens in a patient with any of the conditions described in the DFU. Prior to surgery, physicians should inform prospective patients of possible risks and benefits associated with the EVO/EVO+ ICL. Reference the EVO/EVO+ ICL DFU available at <https://edfu.staar.com/edfu/> for a complete listing of indications, contraindications, warnings and precautions.