Refractive Cataract Surgery: Creating a premium experience
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Cataract surgery has undergone a major transition in the last decade as advanced diagnostic technology, femtosecond laser, and presbyopia/astigmatism-correcting intraocular lenses (IOLs) have ushered in a new era of refractive cataract surgery. This shift has allowed more patients to enjoy reduced spectacle wear after cataract surgery, and the ability to see without correction across a range of distances can be truly transformational. Benefiting from this opportunity, however, involves increased out-of-pocket costs for patients that can lead to heightened expectations for the receipt of outstanding service and outcomes.

Guided by the concept of the “Experience Economy,” which speaks to the need for businesses to create a memorable experience for customers, we sought to enhance our service and offerings by introducing modifications in our practice communications, staff training, and office environment.1,2 Creating this experience rests on the foundation of achieving outstanding surgical results, as measured by unparalleled refractive and functional outcomes. Such outstanding results have been enabled by implementation of the most-advanced techniques and technologies, including femtosecond laser-assisted cataract surgery (FLACS) using the CATALYS® Precision Laser System and TECNIS Symfony® extended-depth-of-focus IOLs.

Setting the stage
Our effort to develop a premium refractive cataract surgery practice that offers patients a memorable experience began with attention to creating positive initial impressions and interactions, even before patients set foot in our office. Many of our cataract surgery patients are seen as referrals, and in 2017, the practice doorstep has moved online. We redesigned our practice website with an aesthetically pleasing, modern appearance and a goal to make it engaging. Websites should be “responsive,” meaning that they display appropriately and are easy to navigate through mobile devices, tablets, and personal computers. Consideration also was given to the content of our written communications with patients. Prior to their preoperative visit, all cataract surgery candidates receive a packet that provides information about the procedure and what they should expect at their upcoming appointment. The material is sent by mail to new patients and distributed at the office to existing patients who are deemed to need cataract surgery.

This information introduces the availability of a refractive cataract surgery package and describes the components of that service, including IOL options providing reduced spectacle wear and use of the femtosecond laser and other new technologies for cataract surgery. The introductory material Prepares patients for making a decision about the opportunity for refractive cataract surgery after they meet with a surgeon. We believe it is helpful for creating a mindset that recognizes refractive cataract surgery as a premium alternative to traditional cataract surgery.

Integral to our aim of creating a memorable experience, we also transformed the physical appearance of our office (with a function- and design-oriented office renovation) so that patients feel they are receiving care in a boutique hotel or airline lounge rather than in a traditional medical practice or clinic. The waiting room has been renamed “the reception lounge,” and it provides a setting for further educating patients about our practice and services. A flat screen monitor video displays information about our doctors and procedures, as well as media clips and other practice information using subtitles instead of audio to eliminate extraneous noise. Cataract patients are additionally given a tablet-based education video. The office staff strives to provide a level of service that customers would receive at the best hotels and restaurants in New York City. Creating this memorable experience for our patients requires continually learning lessons from the hospitality business.

Delivering successful clinical outcomes
Clearly, there is no premium service without a premium surgery that can meet and exceed patient expectations. Therefore, surgeons need to become students of continually evolving refractive surgery principles and stay current with advances in techniques and technologies that enhance our ability to achieve the desired outcomes.

First, surgeons need to educate themselves on appropriate patient selection for presbyopia-correcting IOLs and proper matching of individual patient needs with the performance characteristics of different lenses. In addition, surgeons must hone their own and their office staff’s communication processes, which will help facilitate an informed discussion of the technology that will...

The office before and after renovation
The CATALYS® Precision Laser System allow patients choosing refractive cataract surgery to feel confident they made a well-informed decision.

Integrating the state of the art in diagnostic modalities, planning calculators, surgical technologies, and IOL options has also been critical to our surgical success. This includes use of advanced diagnostic devices for identifying ocular surface disease and retinal pathologies that can limit visual outcomes. In addition, we implement the latest generation in optical biometry, corneal topography (able to measure both anterior and posterior corneal astigmatism), and the latest-generation IOL formulas that provide the most-accurate power calculations.

I am performing FLACS for all of my refractive cataract surgery cases to take advantage of its benefits. Using the CATALYS System, I can consistently create a capsulotomy that is predictably circular and accurately sized, factors which are critical for achieving the 360° IOL overlap needed to maintain long-term positional stability. Further, the scanned capsule function of the CATALYS System’s 3D optical coherence tomography (OCT) technology provides the ability to center the anterior capsule opening on the lens rather than on the pupil, which may be particularly desirable when implanting a toric or presbyopia-correcting IOL. The CATALYS System can also be used to create arcuate incisions. Intraoperatively, I also use real-time wavefront aberrometry for assisting with IOL power selection and toric IOL alignment.

When it comes to recommending IOLs for patients choosing refractive cataract surgery, the TECNIS Symfony IOL or its toric version are my preferred options. In my opinion, the TECNIS Symfony IOLs bring game-changing advantages to our arsenal of presbyopia-correcting IOLs. The novel optic design of the TECNIS Symfony IOLs provides a continuous range of uncorrected vision. Therefore, these IOLs address our modern lifestyle needs for good uncorrected intermediate vision. In addition, nighttime visual disturbances that have weighed down earlier multifocal IOL technology occur at a low incidence with the unique optics of the TECNIS Symfony IOLs.

The opportunity to simultaneously correct up to 2.5 diopters of preexisting corneal astigmatism with the toric version of the TECNIS Symfony IOL has expanded the pool of patients who are appropriate for presbyopia-correcting IOLs. Combined with all the other technology, we are now performing refractive cataract surgery with greater confidence.

Setting realistic expectations preoperatively is the basis for achieving patient satisfaction postoperatively. Patients must be educated about the benefits and limitations of all IOL options, and the information for the TECNIS Symfony IOLs must include mention of the potential for needing glasses to read up close or in dim light, nighttime visual symptoms, and a refractive enhancement. With the TECNIS Symfony IOLs, however, I find that the preoperative counseling discussion is simplified, and the postoperative visit has become more positive for the surgeon and the patient. Patients are amazed by and appreciative of their ability to see so well at all distances.

Closing thoughts

The need to pay for healthcare is becoming more familiar to patients with the proliferation of high-deductible insurance plans and the growing demand for private-pay lifestyle medical offerings. Patients choosing private-pay refractive cataract surgery will be best satisfied if they believe they have gained value for the extra cost.

Advances in surgical techniques and technologies have increased our ability to achieve transformational lifestyle outcomes that meet or even exceed patient expectations, but creating a memorable experience from first to last interaction also needs to be part of the strategy. Introducing changes to optimize the office environment and service delivery provide the wrapping that completes the premium package of our life-changing experience.

REFERENCES

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