

Developing a vision for your practice

Colin Kerr **Autor**
Executive Editor, *EuroTimes*

Great ophthalmologists do not necessarily make great business experts. For that reason, in 2008 the ESCRS – European Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgeons –, in co-operation with the society's news magazine *EuroTimes*, established a Practice Development Programme specifically aimed at eye surgeons.

The purpose of this programme was to get business and management experts to advise doctors on how they can run their practices successfully. Sometimes, businesses fail. Although the failure rate may be lower than in private practice ophthalmology, there is no guarantee that if you decide to set up your own practice it will be successful. If you are a public sector employee and your income comes largely from the state or a state organisation you can enjoy job security and minimise risk. However, many ophthalmologists may decide that this security is offset by the lack of control that you enjoy as an employee in deciding your own destiny and shaping your career.

RISK ASSESSMENT

Before you decide to establish your own private practice/business is to carry out a risk/benefit analysis assessing your current and future financial position, job security and work/

life balance. Work/life balance may be particularly important as if you run a private practice you will need to be more flexible in the hours you may offer your services. Alternatively, you also have the opportunity to organise your hours to ensure you have spare time to spend with family and friends. Where will you locate your practice? You will need a large population base and you should establish yourself in an area where the population is expanding and not declining. Study local census figures and contact the relevant authorities to help you assess population and housing projections both in the short and long term. If you decide to set up practice in a particular location talk to some of your colleagues in that area. Also, read the local newspapers, which are always a good source of information. Before setting up, you must be confident that there is a demand for your services. If there is not you run the risk of business failure.

BUYING A PREMISES..

You need to find suitable premises (not too big/not too small) and then raise capital to finance it.

Should you buy or should you lease? Before you approach a financial institution, make sure you have a well thought out

business plan. You should get professional assistance from an accountant or financial advisor in drawing up this plan.

Once you have convinced a lender that your new business will be viable you should be aggressive in negotiating discounted rates. Do not borrow more money than you need to borrow. The first measure of success is that you are happy working as a clinician in a private practice and that your patients are happy. The second measure is that your business is generating a steady source of income based on the projections in your business plan. You may have planned to make a loss in Year 1, break even in Year 2 and make a small profit in Year 3. If you do not make these targets, or even if you exceed them, you need to reassess your plan.

PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

As an ophthalmologist you probably have limited business training or knowledge. For that reason, you need to employ professional support, either on a full-time or part-time basis, for payment of salaries, taxation and bill collection. You also need to monitor how your money is spent. Do not buy or lease equipment unless you know there is a demand for the service this equipment

provides. Good management, good administration and good financial control will grow your income, but it will also make life a lot easier for you.

If you expand, you will need to employ more staff. You may also decide to seek a partner or partners to help you run the business. They will share in the risks and the benefits. You should decide at an early stage if all partners will be equal or will you as the Managing Partner be entitled to a larger share of the profit.

If you run the practice on your own with the support of practice staff, you should hold regular meetings to advise and consult them of how the business is succeeding or not succeeding. You should seek their advice and ask for their suggestions, but if you are a sole practitioner, remember that ultimately the responsibility for the success or failure of the business lies with you and you alone.

If you are in partnership with a number of colleagues, you have the opportunity not only to innovate but also to suggest and implement innovations, which the business should benefit from.

ESCRS VIENNA 2011

All of these topics have been discussed at the ESCRS Practice Development Workshops

at the Society's Congresses in Berlin, Barcelona and Paris. Now three years later, under the guidance of the ESCRS Practice Development Committee, chaired by Paul Rosen, UK, the programme has increased in popularity and for the first time in Vienna, it will run for three full days.

This year's programme is also different as for the first time it will feature a specially devised schedule of modules which will all link together. This will allow doctors, practice managers and other participants who attend to work directly with the teachers and discuss the individual problems they face in their practices.

On Saturday September 17, Rod Solar of LiveseySolar Practice Builders will moderate a workshop on Marketing your Practice. This will be an interactive workshop where Mr Solar will advise delegates on addressing key marketing functions in their individual practices.

On Sunday September 18, Paul McGinn, barrister at law and EuroTimes editor, Tom Harbin MD, author of *What Every Doctor Should Know but Was Never Taught in Medical School* and Kris Morrill, director KAM Communications will moderate the sec-

ond workshop on Managing Your Practice.

The programme concludes on Monday September 19 when the third Masterclass for Ophthalmologists will be delivered in Vienna by Prof Keith Willey, London Business School. At previous congresses, the Masterclass has been held on a Friday but this year it will be held for the first time on a Monday to allow those attending the meeting with busy schedules a better chance of taking part. The topic of this year's Masterclass is "Developing High Performance Practices". Prof Willey will share the profiles of participants following a pre-course survey and make comparisons to businesses in other sectors. This course is limited to 50 participants and the course fee is €200.

For more details on the Practice Development Programme, visit www.es CRS.org. The Proj-

ect Manager for the ESCRS Practice Development Programme is Colin Kerr, Executive Editor, EuroTimes. If you

require any further information, you can contact Colin directly at colin.kerr@euro-times.org.

