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TELE-OPTOMETRY AND THE FUTURE OF REFRACTION 0

BY FRANK GIAMMANCO ON

OPINIONS, UPFRONT

Refraction, once dominated by a century-old technology, is now being altered by new, disruptive options that vary in format and approach. Some use a smartphone and/or an Internet app; others work with practitioners located at other sites.



While several of these alternatives seem ill-fated at worst or dubious at best (e.g., patient self refraction), the idea that this last bastion of traditional vision care is ripe for change is palpable-and for good reason. Successful such alternatives can make vision care far more accessible all over the world.

Of particular note is tele-optometry. Here, a practitioner maybe hundreds or thousands of miles from the actual exam site is able to interact with the patient, perform the refraction via the Internet and deliver the verified Rx to the site for fulfillment.

This concept can conceivably expand the reach of quality vision care in both developed and third world countries, growing the patient base worldwide.

In the U.S. that would mean the prospect of a substantial increase in the number of eye exams performed per year, and an increase in the patient/vision care consumer pool.

If you think about it, the biggest impediments to expanding the pool are access, cost and time. Tele-optometry potentially dismantles each of these obstacles.

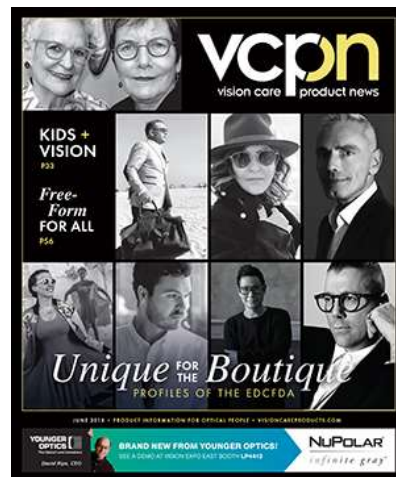
Of course, our industry typically always pushes back against untraditional concepts, and the new refraction alternatives including tele-optometry are no exception.

The anticipated objections are obvious: How accurate is the Rx? Who's supervising the process and how qualified is the individual doing the refraction? What about the other healthcare components of the exam? (There's at least one model available now that offers a comprehensive exam, going beyond simple refraction.)

Lastly, there's the always present issue of self-interest: Can tele-optometry replace on-site optometry?

Pushing back against tele-optometry will probably be as effective as trying to keep the ocean from reaching the shore, especially as tele-medicine in general proliferates. Rather than rail against the new concept, the optical industry would be

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far better served if some brave souls in the community actually took a look at it, participated in it, and even find ways to improve it.

As demand for vision care and correction in the U.S. and around the world mushrooms, this approach would appear to be the most beneficial-and the most progressive.

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