

Building A Dry Eye Practice From The Ground Up: Essential Steps For Success

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Course Description: With dry eye disease on the rise, optometrists have a unique opportunity to deliver impactful care while creating a sustainable source of practice growth. This course offers a step-by-step blueprint for launching and scaling a dedicated dry eye clinic, whether as a standalone specialty clinic or integrated within a primary eye care practice. Participants will explore essential clinical tools, patient workflow design, advanced diagnostics and treatment options, retail strategies, and marketing tactics to attract and retain dry eye patients.

Course Objectives:

1. Describe the key clinical, diagnostic, and procedural components necessary to establish a comprehensive dry eye service within a new or existing practice.
2. Develop a strategic plan for marketing, branding, and patient education to attract and retain a loyal dry eye patient base.
3. Identify effective billing models, office flow systems, pricing strategies, and retail opportunities that support profitability while enhancing patient outcomes and compliance.

Course Outline:

I. Introduction: Why Focus on Dry Eye?

- Rapidly growing patient population (40M+ in the U.S. alone)
- Chronic, underdiagnosed, and often mismanaged condition
- Opportunity for improved patient outcomes and recurring revenue
- Positioning yourself as a dry eye specialist differentiates your practice

II. Clarify Your Clinical & Business Vision

A. Define Your Model

- Integrate into general practice or operate as a stand-alone dry eye center
- Solo venture vs. collaborative care with optometry/ophthalmology
- Telehealth component

B. Investment Timeline

- What to start with (Phase 1)
- When to scale (Phase 2+)
- Leasing vs. purchasing equipment

III. Setting Up the Physical Space

A. Equipment Essentials

- **Must-Haves:** Slit lamp, vital dyes, meibography, tear osmolarity
- **Add-On Tools:** IPL devices, RF, thermal pulsation (e.g. LipiFlow, iLux), LLLT
- **Support Tools:** Imaging integration, EMR dry eye templates

B. Create a Dry Eye Flow Room

- Dedicated space for testing, procedures, education
- Patient Education
- Patient comfort = better compliance & results

C. Inventory and Retail Strategy

- Curate a selection of high-margin, high-impact products:
 - Makeup
 - Skincare
 - lid hygiene
 - nutraceuticals
 - warm compresses
 - Drops
 - Eyeseals/tapes
 - Sunscreen
- Develop bundles for profit + compliance
- Sales/Discount incentives

IV. Diagnostic Protocols & Clinical Pathways

A. Dry Eye Workup Workflow

1. Technician or Team Flow
2. Patient-reported symptoms
 1. Questionnaire: DEQ-5, SPEED questionnaire, OSDI, OSDI-6
 2. Frequency of questionnaires
3. TBUT, staining (NaFl, lissamine green)
4. Lid margin evaluation, meibum expression

5. Tear osmolarity
6. MMP-9
7. Meibography

B. Categorize and Stage the Disease

- Evaporative vs. aqueous-deficient vs. mixed
- TFOS DEWS II staging for consistency
- Webinars, CE, industry journals to stay current

C. Build Treatment Algorithms

- Create a tiered treatment ladder or step-by-step approach
 - Adjunct therapies
 - In Office vs Rx vs At-home therapy
- Emphasize *personalized care plans* and proactive follow-up
- TFOS DEWS III algorithms

V. Branding Your Dry Eye Niche

A. Establish Your Identity

- Practice name or brand extension?
- Taglines and value propositions: "Relief You Can See and Feel"
- Design a logo and message that conveys comfort, precision, and trust

B. Online Presence

- SEO for terms like "dry eye specialist [city]"
- Blog: Write articles on eye strain, dry eye causes, device-related symptoms
- Leverage YouTube or Instagram for short educational clips
- Create a social media action plan

C. Referral & Community Channels

- Educate PCPs, dermatologists, rheumatologists, and allergists on dry eye
- Host dry eye awareness events or workshops
- Create referral packets with diagnostic criteria and co-management protocols

VI. Patient Communication & Education

A. Set Expectations Clearly

- Dry eye is chronic: not cured, but managed
- Outline realistic timelines and costs early

B. Leverage Staff for Education

- Train techs or opticians to explain tests, products, and procedures
- Use tear report handouts or printed diagrams

C. Maximize Compliance

- Email care instructions, reminders
- Offer membership plans for ongoing care (monthly or quarterly follow-ups)

VII. Billing, Coding & Pricing Strategy

A. Proper Coding for Services

B. Develop a Hybrid Model Option

- Insurance + private pay (tiered packages)
- Transparency in pricing: create pre-printed pricing menus or digital checkout systems
- Use CareCredit or other financing options for high-end procedures

C. Product Sales Integration

- Build trust: only sell what you would prescribe to family
- Bundles and subscriptions: “Dry Eye Relief Kit” for home use
- Leverage manufacturer reps to train staff and optimize retail layout

VIII. Scaling & Long-Term Growth

A. Track Metrics

- Monthly case numbers, follow-up rate, average revenue per dry eye patient
- Inventory turnover, compliance rates

B. Add-on Services & Innovations

- Amniotic membranes, PRP, serum tears, drug delivery innovation
- AI diagnostic tools (coming soon)

C. Staff Expansion & Specialization

- Dry eye coordinator or dedicated tech
- Hire MD/DO for procedures (if applicable)
- Cross-train front desk to promote dry eye services during intake calls

- Aesthetic Expansion
 - Medical director
 - Nurse Practitioner
 - Aestheticians

IX. Wrap-Up & Action Plan

A. Recap Core Steps

- Clarify vision, invest wisely, market with intent
- Educate every patient
- Create systems and measure what matters

B. First 90-Day Action Plan

1. Pick 3 dry eye diagnostic tools to implement
2. Train staff on intake questionnaires and staging
3. Launch a basic dry eye marketing page
4. Identify top 5 referral opportunities in your area