My colleagues Alison Tendler, MD, and John Berdahl, MD, and I are fellowship-trained ophthalmologists. The five optometrists who work alongside us in our practice are fellowship trained as well. All of us are committed to providing the best, most advanced technological options to our patients, and we are drivers of the research and development process to improve eye care for the future. We love the work that we do, and we find that our patients value our experience in the field.

A commitment to surgical and clinical excellence will always be important. When patients are referred for cataract or glaucoma treatment, however, they already expect your level of expertise to be exceptional and anticipate that you will recommend the treatment best suited to their situation. Stated another way, there is a sacred trust that you will do the right thing for each patient.

If surgical excellence is expected, then how do you differentiate your practice? The answer, we have found, lies in the patient’s experience.

**DESIGN**

Nearly 2 years ago, we opened a brand-new facility in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, designed to celebrate the patient’s journey to new vision. In the design process, we considered how our patients would interact with the space, what colors would be most inviting, and how natural light would illuminate their different stops from the examination room to the OR. These physical features contribute to the atmosphere of our office (Figure 1).

With the flow of the patient’s journey built into the layout of our new facility, patients can move seamlessly from one area to another, creating a sense of continuity that enhances their overall experience. We believe that by focusing on the patient’s experience, we can differentiate our practice and provide a level of care that meets and exceeds the expectations of our patients.
building, the rest of his or her experience lies in how our team interacts with him or her.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS
Starting with the very first personal interaction, usually a phone call, our first impressions team works to set patients’ expectations for the initial consultation. For example, the staff describes how the consultation will affect the patient’s day and how much time the appointment will take. A few weeks prior to the visit, our team sends information that will familiarize the patient with the options we offer for cataract and glaucoma care. Our goal is then to exceed the expectations we have set.

THE APPOINTMENT
Our technical and first impressions staff is pivotal to patients’ experiences (Figure 2). Upon entering our office, we want a patient to be greeted like a member of our family. Instead of announcing the next person up for an examination to everyone waiting in our atrium, our first impressions team working the front desk will have taken note of what a patient is wearing and where he or she sits so that this person can be called back with a more personal greeting.

As the patient goes through his or her initial appointment, our team keeps track of what he or she identifies as personal favorites. We place a stamp at the front of each chart for this information so that staff members need not ask repeatedly what type of music a patient likes, for example. It is a nicely personalized touch when patients can enter a room and hear their favorite music already playing, be it Bob Dylan or Beethoven.

When patients return for surgery, we already know that they like cream in their coffee and prefer fruit to cookies.

IMPROVING THE EXPERIENCE
We have systems in place to monitor the time a patient spends on each step of the journey. We use the data collected monthly to guide how we approach our workflow for the next month. We are constantly looking for ways to improve.

We also count on our team to pay attention and speak up about ways to improve the patient’s experience. Our team huddles every morning to preview the day and to troubleshoot problems from the previous day. This approach empowers our staff to make daily improvements.

CONCLUSION
You may perform the same surgeries and consultations numerous times in one day, but each patient presents with a fresh perspective. He or she may even be seeing you for the first time. You have an opportunity to make patients feel like honored guests. If you succeed, they will remember your office because of their experiences.

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