

# Refractive and Aesthetic Patients— What's the Difference?

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**M**ost of us rely on previous experience to guide us through new challenges. This is a sound principle as long as we are able to look at what we know with an unbiased eye. Evaluating your aesthetic offering is one of those challenges. Simply

treating your aesthetic business and patient base as you do your refractive business is a common misstep.

## **Patient service expectation**

First, let's look at the similarities of the two entities before we delve into the differences. Most successful refractive practices have developed a

keen sense of patient service. They understand that those seeking a refractive solution, like those seeking cosmetic services, often have an expectation of elevated service. If properly cultivated, these patients can be one of your largest sources of word-of-mouth referrals.

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Refractive and aesthetic candidates also share other similarities. Both have discretionary income but most are still seeking payment options and value for their dollar. While these two groups have some understanding of the product or procedure that they are interested in, education must still be part of the process. You will need an educated professional counselor to take these aesthetic candidates through their choices, help them understand their options, and validate the costs as well as differentiate your practice, services, and physicians. This is not much different than the role your refractive coordinator plays.

### Scope of services

One would think with all of these similarities it would be a cinch to move from successfully offering a range of refractive services such as LASIK, PRK, ICLs, and premium IOLs to growing an aesthetic venture. However, working the subtle differences between the two will ultimately determine your level of success.

Refractive patients understand their need to rid themselves of their glasses or contacts. They have had years of exposure to their options and are somewhat predisposed to think of LASIK as their solution. Aesthetic and plastics clients are often less specific about their desired goals. They want to “look younger” or appear “less tired.” They know they want something done but are often unsure of what it will take to get there. Achieving their desired result may come in stages, depending on their budget and comfort level with the procedures you offer. It is even possible they may have heard about offerings not available at your practice.

It is therefore imperative for a successful aesthetics practice to offer a broad-enough scope of services to cover a range of needs. This should include introductory products such as skin care lines to secondary services such as injectables. Offering introductory services is the first step in developing long-term relationships based on trust and loyalty. The natu-

ral progression would be to add skin rejuvenation including skin tightening, color and wrinkle correction, and ultimately surgical intervention such as blepharoplasty or brow lifts. Having a wide range of alternatives allows the aesthetic patient to comfortably move through your services over time.

### Continuous cultivation= success

Ask yourself if you are addressing the differences between your refractive and aesthetic clients. Is your offering broad enough and progressive enough to keep them in your practice for years to come? Have you considered a loyalty program to encourage them to return for more services over time? Does your staff understand the importance of maintaining contact with these valuable clients? Are they kept in the loop when new offerings arise through newsletters, phone calls, or internet marketing? Is your aesthetics staff up to date on the latest trends in the industry? Continuous cultivation of these clients is a key to your success.

It is the similarities of the two industries that foster initial interest in growing an aesthetic practice, but in the end it is in acknowledging and addressing the differences that will determine success in this exciting field. **AE**



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