

Positive Communication -vs- "Your Spectacles Are Not Ready"

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This article is presented as a suggestion to avoid confrontation and improve communication with patients.

A Common Problem

- ◆ We sincerely try to provide a good service and it is frustrating when something goes wrong beyond our control. If the patient then becomes unhappy, we can have a stressful situation to deal with.
- ◆ Another common problem can arise when a patient is told "Your glasses are not ready". Consider this example...
 - A patient orders spectacles and is told that they will be ready in one week.
 - Then, 6 days later, something goes wrong at the lab and the finished job is rejected. They will have to be re-made.



- Sometimes the patient is simply told "your spectacles are not ready". This is not a good idea.
- The patient will be disappointed and often upset that we have not met our promise – with the result sometimes being unpleasantness and hostility.

This Result is So Unnecessary

- ◆ It's just not possible to say exactly when something that is custom-made will be ready.
- ◆ So the error in communication was really two-fold:
 - How the spectacles were promised.
 - How the news of the delay was presented.



Using Positive Communication Instead

Patients will be far happier, and our lives will be less stressful, if we instead communicate in a positive way.

- ◆ How the spectacles were promised:
 - We are better to let the patient know when we expect them to be ready, rather than an exact "promise". Something like..

"Your spectacles need to be specially made for you. We'll get them started today and they should be ready next Thursday. If there are any delays we'll let you know".

 - So we have communicated that...



It takes time to make a custom-made item

- .. The spectacles are custom made;
- .. The lab will start today;
- .. When they should be ready;
- .. With a complex process, it is possible that something may go wrong;
- .. If there is a delay, we'll keep them informed;
- .. We will be ensuring that they have been made correctly.
- Sometimes the patient will ask for a guarantee of when the spectacles will be finished? Once again, it's not possible to guarantee what might happen with a high technology custom-made item. Instead, say something like...

"We'll hope to have them ready by next Thursday - but they are custom-made just for you and they have to be correct. Something unexpected could happen but I'll ask the lab to do their best".

- ◆ How the news of the delay is presented:
 - It is always better to let the patient know their spectacles are not ready before they come to collect them. A phone call will be appreciated.
 - Let the patient know that the lab is finding it difficult to make the lenses correctly.

In other words, they are not late because we are hopeless, but because of the effort to make sure they are correct.

Say something like...

"We have been notified by the lab



that your new spectacles will not be finished in time for tomorrow. They've had trouble getting one of the lenses correct and are now remaking it for us. I'll call you as soon as we receive it.

..... Yes, your prescription is quite complicated and, of course, we want it to be correct".

- So again we have communicated that...

- .. The spectacles are custom made;
- .. Making them is not straight forward, but high-technology work;
- .. The lab has already invested a lot of effort;
- .. We will be ensuring that they have been made correctly.

People Like to be "Special"

- ◆ As an example, think about people when they have an operation: There is a "pride" about how long the surgery took, or how many



POSITIVE COMMUNICATION

It's not that we have let you down...



...it's the effort we are making to be sure that they are right for you

stitches they had. "Oh you have 12 stitches - I have 25!"

- ◆ Patients also have this type of reaction when we highlight how special their spectacle prescription is.

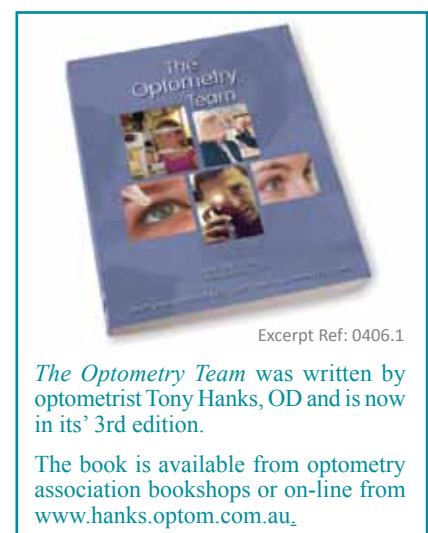
"They are obviously having trouble making your prescription. It is very complicated and quite difficult to produce correctly".

"Your lenses are produced in 4 different laboratories. Firstly the special lens material is produced; then your prescription is polished into it; then they have to go for the coating processes; and then finally to be fitted into your frame. If something goes wrong in one of the last steps, we have to start again to make sure we get it right for you".

- ◆ If their lenses have to come from somewhere special, then tell them. This helps them to appreciate the effort that is being made and how special they are.

"Yes, your lenses can only be made in one place in Australia. They have to come from Adelaide".

- ◆ If their lenses need special processes, then tell them. Again this helps them to appreciate the work involved.



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The *Optometry Team* was written by optometrist Tony Hanks, OD and is now in its' 3rd edition.

The book is available from optometry association bookshops or on-line from www.hanks.optom.com.au