

By P. Dee G. Stephenson, MD

How technology can define quality care



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Ophthalmology, as if you couldn't guess, is a technology-driven subspecialty. Matching the tool or instrument that works best in your hands while simultaneously satisfying patients rivals the search for the Fountain of Youth.

Because our subspecialty is laden with tools of numerous sizes, shapes and endpoints, we must do our homework to decide on the diagnostic equipment or new platforms in which we should invest. And those decisions don't come easy, because mastering a new technique requires time, patience, commitment and potentially stepping out of our comfort zone — let alone dealing with its impact on the practice. Being at the forefront of new technology can be rewarding and scary at the same time.

MY TECHNOLOGY LESSONS

I have always been very interested in astigmatism and how to correct it, but I am not a refractive surgeon — I do not perform LASIK, PRK or SMILE. I am a cataract refractive surgeon, so I want to correct astigmatism right the first time.

Nine years ago, I became a KOL for WaveTec Vision (Alcon) and had the first commercial platform of the ORA System. The ORA's mission — to hone in on the perfect position where an IOL should be implanted by providing key refractive measurements — taught me that to ever improve your outcomes, you must know your benchmarks. I have incorporated this lesson into every aspect of my patient care. By using a data bank of some kind you can refine your results and give patients the best possible outcomes.

Also, I learned the importance of replicating your technique and only changing one thing at a time. If you have too many variables, you miss the forest for the trees. You will never move forward in a positive way unless you can have repeatable results. Once you can repeat results, you can analyze your data, follow your trends and evaluate what produces the best outcomes. Then, you can modify things that don't work and improve the quality of care you give to your patients.

WHERE TO START?

Now that I have shared how I fuse quality care with technology, I suggest taking this trip one step at a time. Understand the nuances of a new diagnostic tool or technique. Consider its ease of use for the technician, how to interpret the results, how to apply it to your workup of the patient and the financial burden it may have.

IT PAYS OFF

I have gone after astigmatism management with a vengeance. I monitor my outcomes in two different data banks and watch my trends, and have become very consistent in my techniques. This allows me to teach these techniques and share my pearls with residents and other colleagues. My quality of care allows for a great rapport with my patients and a successful work environment. Your technique is your painting, your brand or your signature. It is out there for the world to see, so do the best you can and be proud of your work. Embrace new technology, and refine it to work for you. High quality patient care will follow every time. **OM**