



Following on from the release of Part One of *More Patients, More Often* (Optician 14.06.13), the Independent Marketing Partnership takes a closer look at the precise content of recall letters. The toolkit is an initiative led by managing director Graham Hutchison, who can draw from 29 years of experience in optical marketing and patient communications.

He says: 'Many independent practices are using out-dated letters which do not explain in everyday language why regular eye tests are essential. Such letters don't give patients compelling reasons to make an appointment, so costing opticians thousands of pounds in lost income.'

Earlier in the year the toolkit won sponsorship from *Optician*, ABDO and Independents Day, with promotional support from Norville, Continental Eyewear, Mid-Optic and Optisoft.

Michael Potter, head of marketing and communications at ABDO, said: 'With almost 1,000 copies of Part One already distributed, I would now urge those who signed up to take the next step and commit to purchasing Part Two at the special promotional price. More importantly, I recommend practitioners complete the project by fully implementing the initiative in their practice, thereby benefiting from improved and more effective communications with their patients.'

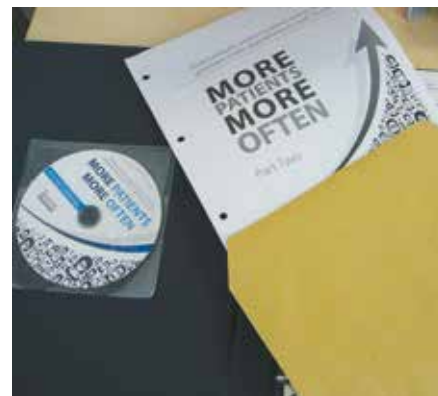
While the first part of the kit explained the financial importance of optimising letters and called for a targeted approach, Part Two includes 86 professionally written letters aimed at a range of patient demographics. Hutchison is encouraging purchasers of the kit to lift specific sentences from the letters, which are written by copywriter Ian Feber.

Simone Mason, dispensing optician at Eyesite in Coventry, says: 'The first part was really good and inspired me to have a go at my own letters. I sent copies to see if they [the Partnership] could critique what I'd done. One of the things they pointed out was overusing the word "we" when the name of the opticians will register more with the patient. It was a really useful exercise to make you realise you can't really write your own letters without some professional opinion.'

One of the key messages of Part Two of the toolkit is targeting specific groups, including children, students, younger adults, presbyopes and the

Dear Patient

According to our records it's time for your next examination of patient recall letters – this is the message to independent practitioners from the authors of *More Patients, More Often Part Two*



Optical practitioners are in a strong position to use direct marketing

over-60s. After reading it Mason hopes to extend Eyesite's current mix of glaucoma, diabetes and contact lens patient letters.

Another consideration is the frequency of distribution, with the recommendation to send out five different recall letters within a six-month period. Mason says: 'If it is just that drip-feed every four to five weeks then it makes an impact. I know as a busy, working mum that when a letter lands in my porch, if it doesn't make an impact or doesn't action me to do something then it can easily get mislaid and forgotten. But if the recall letter made an impression on me – I might just pop "book eye test" on my to-do-list.'

Andrew Duffield, optometrist and owner of Duffield & Duffield Ophthalmic Opticians in Essex, is also changing his recall letters on the strength of reading the toolkit, after 10 years of keeping them the same and only mailing patients every two years.

'We've been very lazy in the past,' he says. 'We haven't been talking the patient's language or engaging with them.' Just like Mason, Duffield realised his recall letters were using the word 'we' too much – communicating what he says is a 'them and us' message. He also learnt to include a PS at the end of a letter to drop in selling points such as contact lenses. 'In the space of a few sentences you can get your message across,' he says.

Duffield is now preparing a series of new recall letters targeted at individual patient groups including those with glaucoma, diabetes and macular degeneration.

He says: 'We had one letter for adults and one letter for children, we are not unusual in that respect but it is very basic.'

'As the eye care providers we should know that Mrs Smith has got glaucoma, but we weren't doing any of that before. Our new letters are more informative and more bespoke now. If you mention a just a little bit about their history the patient thinks you know all about them.'

Duffield stresses that while Part One of the toolkit has its merits, the example recall letters in Part Two provide the template to actually carry out work on new letters, with time of a premium when it comes to running an optical practice.

He adds: 'I am always working in the practice rather than on it. Until we got Part Two I honestly thought it was still going to be hard to implement the ideas from Part One.'

'It is one thing having the knowledge but it is no good if you don't implement it.'

● **More Patients, More Often Part Two**, costing £195 with an early order discount or £295 thereafter, can be ordered at www.opticalmarketing.co.uk/opt