



To earn the title of Optometrist of the Year takes dedication, hard work and a lot of sacrifices says this year's holder of the accolade, Kirit Patel

**O**ptometrist of the Year is one of the most prestigious categories at the Optician Awards and, as such, is always hotly contested by practitioners from around the country. This year's winner was Kirit Patel of Radlett Opticians in Hertfordshire.



**Kirit Patel has received tremendous patient feedback from being an Optician Award winner**

# Optometrist of the Year

For over two decades, Patel has treated local people in the practice, but says this extends to patients from as far afield as California, China and even New Zealand.

'It's a tremendous achievement,' says Patel on his award win. 'The patients have seen the trophy and I have received tremendous feedback. But being recognised by your peers is the best thing about winning the award,' he adds.

'The awards night was absolutely fantastic – well organised and entertaining. The suspense was unbearable,' he says. 'I was happy enough to have won the first award (Technology Practice of the Year), but to win the final award – the crème de la crème – was fantastic. I really couldn't believe it. I enjoyed the interviews too as they were a bit like the Oscars.'

So what does it take to earn the title of Optometrist of the Year? 'Dedication, hard work and a lot of sacrifices. I work six days a week

and my family sometimes miss out on things, but they're very understanding,' says Patel.

Hard work is something that he is acutely aware of, as he is the practice optometrist, dispensing optician, contact lens teacher as well as the business owner. Among all these duties, he also finds the time to write CET articles for *Optician*.

'It's very difficult to balance all of these aspects and as we grow, it is becoming more of a challenge. I'm comfortable with dispensing and optometry, but the management aspect of the business is definitely the most challenging,' he says.

## Plans for growth

Expansion of the practice is at the forefront of Patel's plans, but he was recently dealt a blow with the collapse of a shop purchase. Not one to dwell on matters, he has switched his focus to a full practice refit which will be implemented in the very near future.

The award has also expanded the practice's patient base significantly, he says. 'We're now booking four weeks in advance, since winning the award – which is absolutely phenomenal. We get people and patients commenting on the awards poster in the window on a daily basis. The practice gets most of its patients through word of mouth and recommendations and this is the sort of thing that can really increase.' The practice has also benefited from

media coverage in local papers and magazines.

Patel says he is a great believer in the concept of community optometry and regularly gets involved with local lectures, diabetic screening and glaucoma co-management. The concept has seen him forge close links with GPs and local eye specialists, the results of which, he believes, mean better care for patients.

But as much as he believes in the community, the community believes in him. Patel has received countless letters from patients and practitioners saluting his skills and relationship with the patients. He often receives questions from fellow eye care professionals and always takes the time to answer.

As a winner of Optometrist of the Year, what advice would Patel offer optometrists? 'Knowledge is an immensely important part of the skill set,' he says. 'It allows you to explain things to patients in much simpler terms – which puts them at ease. When dealing with wet maculopathy for example, the last thing you want is for an optometrist to panic or be nervous, because that will immediately put the patient on edge. There will be all manner of things running through their heads when they hear wet AMD being mentioned, but if the management of the condition is explained well, the stress can be dealt with.' ●

● **Optometrist of the Year sponsored by BBGR**  
**Winner - Kirit Patel, Radlett Opticians**

**Shortlisted**  
 Adrian Kite, Kite Opticians  
 Reshma Patel, Templeman Opticians  
 Umarfarouq Jussab, St Peter's Eye Clinic  
 Michelle Beach, Park Vision