



CL Practitioner of the Year

Lancashire contact lens optician David Gould was the recipient of the Contact Lens Practitioner of the Year award

The Lancashire town of Rawtenstall, gateway to the Rossendale valley, is the end of the line for the single-track steam railway that has featured in many a period film and TV drama. But there is nothing remotely old-fashioned about one of the town's greatest attractions, David Gould Opticians.

With sites in Rawtenstall and nearby Haslingden, the business boasts not one but two winners of the coveted Contact Lens Practitioner of the Year Award. Contact lens optician and owner David Gould took the title at this year's Optician awards, following a win by his colleague Nick Howard in 2012.

For any practice, the range of contact lenses Gould fits is unusually large. For a relatively small, rural practice, that patients are often offered lenses before they are generally available elsewhere is exceptional. Little wonder that even patients who have moved to the other end of the country or abroad still return to him for their lenses.

'Footfall is hardly our practices' greatest asset,' says Gould, 'so we have to generate our business in more imaginative and creative ways.'

Whether that means being one of the first in the UK to install a new topographer that allows detailed analysis of the tear film, or having a list of 70 patients waiting to try the next silicone hydrogel daily disposable lens, Gould's strategy is clearly working.

Ten years since he took over the practice about 40 per cent of turnover comes from contact lenses and related products, with most patients on monthly payment plans. Three-quarters of the contact lens business is generated by the Rawtenstall practice.

Gould has taken part in product evaluations and clinical studies for most of the major UK suppliers before lenses come to market. Fitting sets include the most up to date of the new hybrid and semi-scleral lenses. 'As soon as a new design becomes available, I just have to have it,' says Gould.

The practice has also been offering orthokeratology for several years and the potential of this technique, and



Contact Lens Practitioner of the Year, sponsored by Alcon, was David Gould (centre), pictured with Alcon's Cameron Hudson and presenter Hugh Dennis

others, for myopia control is a growing interest. 'With all the research in this area, we feel it's something we need to be aware of. I'm eagerly awaiting the first centre distance, multifocal silicone hydrogel daily disposable,' he adds.

Gould describes himself as a 'huge

fan' of multifocal contact lenses and recently ran a series of multifocal workshops as well as writing on the topic for *Optician*. Aside from traditional CET, he also meets up with a small group of colleagues – unofficially known as CLERDS (contact lens nerds) – to discuss unusual cases and share ideas, most recently on a peer review basis.

Playing an active role in the local business community is another asset to the practice. David Gould Opticians was nominated Retailer of the Year 2012 in the Rossendale Business Awards and Gould is the current president of the Rawtenstall Chamber of Commerce.

'Our town has a strong independent retail sector and we can offer services that the big companies can't. It's good to shout about things like that and show people you care.'

While community involvement often attracts media coverage, winning the Optician award has opened up even more opportunities. 'Most of the local papers ran the story and word spreads quickly in a small town,' says Gould. Newspaper clippings are on display in the reception area along with the Contact Lens Practitioner of the Year trophy.

'I would never have put myself forward for the award. It's just not my thing,' he admits, 'but I would encourage anyone who's ever thought about entering to go ahead. My team were very proud of me for winning and it's nice to be held in high regard within the profession as well as by patients.'

For all its cutting-edge approach, one principle that Gould holds above all others is a distinctly old-fashioned concept. As he explains: 'We give our patients as much benefit as we can from modern-day technology but, above all, we give them something from a bygone era... and that's time.' ●



● Contact Lens Practitioner of the Year sponsored by Alcon
Winner: David Gould, David Gould Opticians

Shortlisted:
Ros Mussa, Boots Opticians, London
Agnes Ali, Keith Holland & Associates
Keith Tempny, Tepany's Boutique Opticians
Michael Killpartrick, Ellis and Kilpartrick Opticians