



Dry Eye Practice of the Year

A gleaming Art Deco Optician Award trophy stands safely locked up in a glass cabinet in pride of place in Turners Optometrists' smart Bridgwater practice, but things could have been very different.

On the night the trophy was won the shiny prize was tucked up in bed with a proud member of staff and the practice managers were wondering if they would ever see it again.

The pride felt by Turners' on winning the Dry Eye Practice of the Year Award provides a neat insight into the passion and attention to detail Turners' staff take in caring for patients. Dry eye was recognised by Turners as an issue increasingly seen in clinics and presented itself as a new area of practice.

Ocular hygienist

The management of dry eye at Turners is handled by Beverley Issitt in the newly created role of ocular hygienist. This frees up chair time, explains Issitt who is a former nurse and optical assistant. She is well known and liked by patients and has the people skills to give dry eye patients the support they need. The nature of the condition means it is managed rather than cured, she says, something patients can do themselves with the right support.

'A lot of people like the idea of the

Turners Optometrists is recognised for a new approach to managing patients' dry eye which helps build business and practice loyalty



Proud winners: Beverley Issitt and Richard Llewellyn

contact. This might be occasional visits to the practice with phone calls in between.' She empathises with the patients because she has dry eye herself and 'knows how miserable it can be'. She has also enjoyed learning new skills and developing her role within the practice.

Patients are referred from the consulting room but increasingly find their own way to the practice from the website or through word of mouth. 'It's a practice builder,' says Issitt.

Under the practice's eye care plan patients pay a fixed monthly fee for eye care and receive the professional time they need which separates products from eye care.

'This makes us the first port of call for eye-related problems,' says Richard Llewellyn, senior optometrist.

Dry eye and lid issues were often conditions patients were not having satisfactorily resolved elsewhere. 'Patients were being told by GPs to buy some baby shampoo and go home,' says Llewellyn.

Having decided there was a need for a dry eye service, a business plan was drawn up, says Janet Hatt, business director. 'Patients need time to talk,' she says, to explain the issues and introduce treatments. So the role of ocular hygienist was created.

Training was provided by Spectrum Thea. 'All of the staff can answer



the basic questions,' says Hatt. As an Investors In People Gold award holder Turners also welcomed the staff development opportunities with the creation of the new role.

Great timing

The Optician Awards couldn't have come at a better time for Turners and its foray into dry eye, says Hatt. 'It was absolutely the right time and we thought we could win it because we could see the benefit of the whole project. It was so exciting.'

The whole practice team was involved and the award has been used on Facebook and in the local press to publicise the practice. 'People like to belong to an award-winning practice, It's a great way of identifying a practice that is trying hard,' she says.

The practice took a contingent up to Birmingham for the black tie awards presentation. 'The night was wonderful, as always, and wonderful for Bev,' says Hatt. 'She was genuinely surprised that her contribution had been recognised. She wouldn't let go of the award and she slept with it that night. She was so proud to have received it on behalf of the practice because everything we do is such a team effort.'

Llewellyn says he would encourage others to enter the Optician Awards not just to win but because it is a great evening. 'The Optician Awards is good for optics, we can be a bit po-faced sometimes. It's a good fun evening.' And on the serious side: 'Anything that focuses your mind on how you run your business is good. It makes you think about what you are doing. The Optician Awards are really beginning to represent the new areas of optometry and practice,' he says.

His advice for others is to get involved with the awards, be different and stand apart. 'We have never ploughed the conventional furrow,' he concludes. ●



OPTICIAN
AWARDS

● **Dry Eye Award, sponsored by Spectrum Thea**
Winner: Turners Optometrists, Bridgwater

Shortlisted: Boots Opticians, Nuneaton
Ivan Cammack (Optometrist), Thame
GT Harvey and Partners, Newcastle upon Tyne
Lynne Fernandes Optometrists, Nailsea