



# Contact lens champion

Contact Lens Practitioner of the Year Max Halford's aim is for every patient who attends his practice to be fitted with contact lenses in the course of their visit. Such is his dedication to growing his business and the contact lens market

**F**or Max Halford, a change of direction in the early 1990s from banking to trainee manager at a medical eye centre was the first step in a career that this year saw him take the prestigious title Contact Lens Practitioner of the Year.

Qualifying first as a dispensing optician, Halford moved to Boots Opticians 17 years ago to train as a contact lens optician and in 2006 opened a flagship store for the company in Plymouth's Drake Circus.

With five consulting rooms and a contact lens patient base that makes up nearly a quarter of its business, the large city-centre practice is serious about contact lenses. And so is Halford. 'It's very, very rare on a daily basis for us to see any patient who's not suitable for contact lenses,' he says.

'Everything we do is focused on getting the message across, from mentioning contact lenses when the patient books and at pre-screening, to offering every patient a contact lens trial.' Staff incentives and training are also key to the store's proactive approach, which saw its contact lens business grow by over 25 per cent in 2010.

The awards judges particularly praised one initiative when the practice took a stand at Plymouth University's Freshers' Fayre that resulted in more than 180 new fit appointments being booked. The team plans to repeat that success with this year's student intake and will also be working with Boots the Chemist to target schools and sports clubs with a UV protection message.

### No limits

Conventional wisdom has it that multiple practices fit plenty of contact lenses but are restricted in the types of lenses they can prescribe. Halford disagrees: 'I'm not at all limited in the lenses I fit and can go to virtually any UK supplier. In fact manufacturers recognise that we have a very large patient base and we're often invited to trial new products before they're launched.'

Trials are often business-oriented,



**Halford: 'We want them to believe it's unusual not to be a contact lens wearer'**

such as a new project from September aimed at practice growth which, if successful, will be rolled out regionally and nationally. 'We never turn down an opportunity to get involved,' says Halford.

While its RGP business is described as 'steady', the practice predominantly fits soft lenses and continuous wear is

a popular option. For existing wearers, each visit is an opportunity to discuss their current lens type or modality and offer an upgrade to newer lens types.

'I'm particularly interested in the opportunities afforded by silicone hydrogels and the new-style premium daily disposables in the refitting of previous non-tolerance cases,' he says, adding that 75 per cent of the lenses he prescribes fall into these categories.

Unusually, Halford has a special interest in contact lens fitting for diabetics and has a City & Guilds qualification in diabetic screening. He also sits on the board of the local PCT diabetic screening group and is an active member of the local optical committee.

### Team effort

As manager of a large team, Halford was 'over the moon' when the Plymouth store was a joint winner of the Multiple Practice of the Year two years ago. 'We were really pleased to win and thought at the time it would be nice to work towards an individual award. We pride ourselves on our achievements, not only as a group of people but also individually.'

He regards the contact lens award as recognition for the whole team and a reflection that their approach is the right one. 'Such a big part of our business is getting people into contact lenses who've never had a contact lens conversation before. We want them to believe it's unusual not to be a contact lens wearer.'

Already a devotee of the EASE approach (Enhance the Approach to Selecting Eyewear) to fitting as an aid to spectacle dispensing, Halford's aim is for every patient who attends the practice to be fitted with contact lenses in the course of their visit, such that a contact lens trial becomes 'almost part of the eye examination'.

After this year's success the Plymouth team is planning to enter the awards again next year, most likely in a team category. 'We'll definitely be entering the awards again – we do enjoy it and it's very good fun. I was absolutely overjoyed to win this year and we had a great time.' ●

### CONTACT LENS PRACTITIONER OF THE YEAR

● **Winner** Max Halford, Boots Opticians, Plymouth, Devon

● **Shortlisted**  
Clare Holland, Keith Holland & Associates, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire  
Rob Jones, Parley Optometrists, Ferndown, Dorset  
Judith Robinson, N and J Robinson Optometrists, Monkseaton, Tyne and Wear  
Chaaban Zeidan, Zeidan Eyecare Centre, Tamworth, Staffordshire

