

Retail Optical Training Programme

Karen Clegg reviews a new text-based course aimed at support staff training

The arrival of a copy of TMR's Retail Optical Training Programme (Second edition) caused quite a stir among my colleagues as they speculated on who had been identified to undertake the programme, who would deliver and support it, when it would commence and so on. When I explained that it was, in fact, a copy sent to me for review purposes only, I detected a distinct feeling of anti-climax in the air.

Programme format, aims and key content

The programme is presented in A4 ring binder form, the contents of which are divided into 10 distinct, self-contained sections covering a comprehensive range of topics relevant to optical support staff. The author, Martin Russ, describes the training programme as:

- A training resource for managers/supervisors to use for training support staff
- A reference resource to:
 - Refresh lapsed knowledge
 - Present new ideas for improving both personal and practice performance
 - Help improve the level of care and service to patients.
- Aimed at both experienced staff and those who are completely new to the optical assistant role
- Designed to be used either for self-study or with a course leader or in groups.

Russ recommends tackling one or two sections per week. He estimates two hours will be needed per section. However, this could prove a tall order for busy practices to spare staff (and trainer) for two hours each week, and then ensure that the learning is followed up and embedded. Also some of the 'meatier' sections may be too much for trainees to digest at one sitting. For example, learning how to dispense single vision, bifocals and multifocals in two hours seems a rather ambitious goal, even for those with an appetite for 'stretch' targets.

Section contents

Section topics are presented in a logical sequence but with flexibility to rearrange the order or cherry pick to align with the needs of the learner and the business.

Each section includes:

- Key information and/or concepts associated with the subject
- Diagrams and graphics to re-enforce the main points of the text
- Exercises for the learner to undertake to help consolidate and confirm learning before moving forward.

Sections include effective customer care, basic optics, screening, frames and lenses, selling skills, dispensing, contact lenses and legal matters.

While the content is impressive, what is not present, but would have been helpful, is a set of clearly stated learning outcomes for each section. Reminders at the end of each section for individuals to set personal objectives would also have been useful.

Stars of the show

There are two real stand-out sections within this resource – Effective customer care and Selling skills. These are described as being 'soft' skills and as such, the focus is primarily on the development of behavioural skills. I wholeheartedly believe that optical support staff and professionals alike have much to gain from undertaking more development in the above-mentioned areas. Behavioural skills are the magical ingredient that can transform an average patient experience into a fabulous one.

Unfortunately, reading the material will not in itself change behaviour but if it is followed up by discussion, repeated practice with team colleagues and commitment to provide ongoing feedback then who knows what great results might be achieved.

Where practice managers and their teams commit to undertaking the training and in transferring their learning to their day-to-day interactions with patients, the business could well have a blockbuster for success on their



hands. The fact the above two sections to be worthy of special mention should not be interpreted as a criticism of the remaining sections – the content of all sections of the programme are highly appropriate for training of support staff when carried out under the guidance of a suitably qualified practitioner.

Buyer beware

I would advise caution on purchasing this resource with the intention of providing it to staff purely as a 'self-study' resource. This would require an exceptionally motivated trainee with the maturity to take ownership for his or her own learning and the ability to make the leap from acquisition of knowledge to application. New skills need to be practised by the learner and observed by an appropriately skilled individual to provide the learner with feedback and encourage him or her to use their skills with customers and patients.

However, I do believe this would be an excellent, value for money 'off the shelf' option for practices where there is a suitably enthusiastic optometrist or dispensing optician able to deliver the sections as training sessions and management commitment to follow up the training in the workplace to ensure application of knowledge and practising of new skills to enable trainees to become confident and competent. ●

● To order a copy of Retail Optical Training Programme (second edition) at a specially reduced price of £195, call TMR on 01252 626137.

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