Letter to the *Journal*

**Patient Management and the Ophthalmic Photographer**

While screening a patient recently, I asked if she had ever had photographs taken of her eyes, or ever had a fluorescein angiogram. Suddenly, her eyes got wide and I could see she was genuinely afraid. When I asked her if anything was wrong, she proceeded to tell me how she had photographs taken at another eye center three months previously and was yelled at by the photographer for not cooperating. She went home feeling embarrassed and confused. Subsequently, she did not return for her follow up visit for fear she would need to have photographs taken again.

This was not the first time I had heard a story where a patient had been treated rudely or impersonally, but the fact that the patient had been too afraid to show up for her follow up exam was upsetting. What if the patient had further vision complications due to her fear of confronting the photographer again? I felt compelled to write this letter so photographers might treat the patients more like people and less like a chart with a patient ID number.

Working in a demanding practice, as I do, where time is split in ten different ways, makes it difficult to be pleasant to everyone and still get everything done. However, the photographer must always remember that the person brought back for an angiogram is likely to be confused and frightened at the prospect of losing their eyesight. You must always take the time to address those fears and listen to the patient. Here are a few items I stress when training a new photographer:

1. Take time to explain the procedure thoroughly to patients and listen to their questions and concerns. Do not rush through the explanation as though they were part of an assembly line.
2. Never force a reluctant patient into having an angiogram. If they are unsure, let the physician speak with the patient again (A temporarily irritated physician is better than a law suit later.)
3. Treat the patient with the same respect that you would treat your mother.
4. Talk to the patients. Remember that silence will only heighten their anxiety. Anxiety increases the likelihood of a reaction.
5. Speak in a clear and calm manner; never raise your voice or show irritation.
6. Let the patient blink when you are not taking photographs! I have found this to be one of the most common problems with beginning photographers.
7. When shooting an angiogram pay attention to the way the patient responds to you. You may be able to pick up a reaction early enough to head it off before it becomes too serious.
8. Once you bring a patient in and shut the door, treat the patient as if he/she is the only one you are scheduled to see that day (even though the waiting room may be packed).
9. Praise the patents on how well they are doing and always help them to their feet and escort them out.
10. When possible have someone dilate you and photograph your eyes so you can better understand what the patient is going through.

These steps may seem simple enough, but when in a hurry there is the danger of becoming too mechanical and thus alienating the patient. In conclusion, I have found that by putting the patient at ease makes the job of ophthalmic photographer simpler and more rewarding.

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