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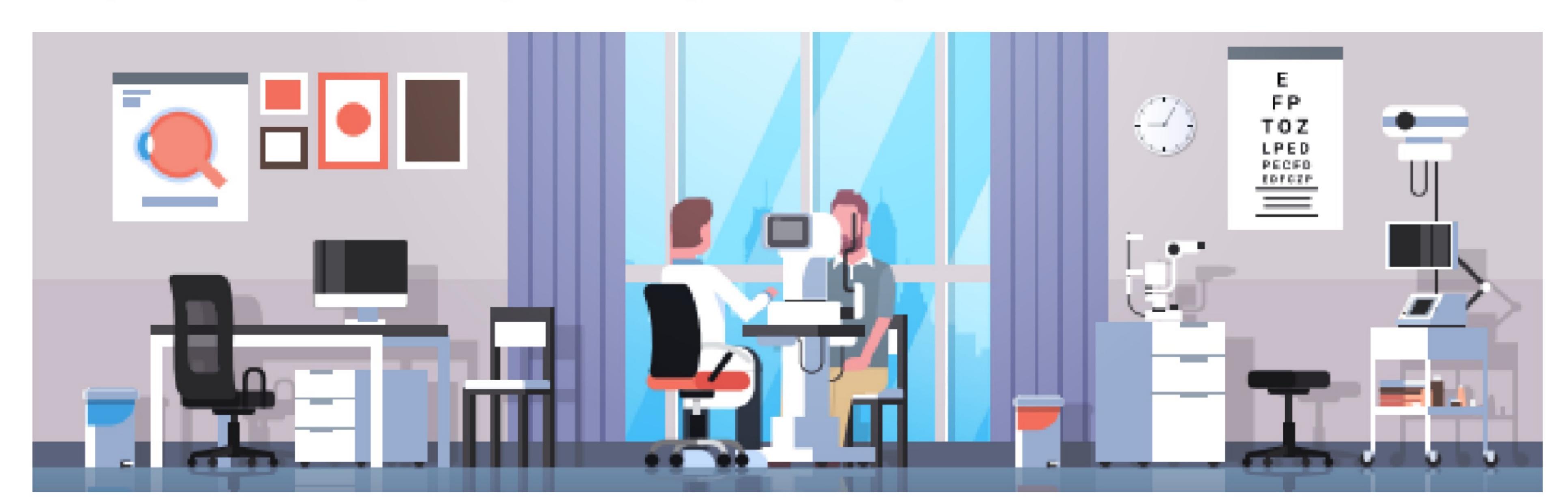
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Engaging conversations

It's good to talk, but you have to get your message across when you converse with your patients. ESCRS Practice Management and Development Programme Manager Colin Kerr reports.





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Rod Solar, Director of Practice Development Consulting, Livesey Solar As the COVID 19 pandemic continues to restrict interactions between ophthalmologists and their patients, social media is becoming increasingly important for surgeons who need to reach out to their patients in the new era of social distancing and restricted movement. Many opthalmologists are doing this through Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter and other platforms but are they reaching their targets? "You have to be really clear about what social media is about and how it's not just media, but it's also social," says Rod Solar, Director of Practice Development Consulting, LiveseySolar. "The key thing to remember there is that it's a conversational medium, it's an interactive medium. It's good that ophthalmologists are using social media, but what they are doing is that they are using it like a broadcast medium. So, they put up a picture, they put up a video, they put up a post and they say: "Here is my message to the world." "What they are not doing," says Solar, "is engaging in conversations. They are not asking questions, they are not challenging people to respond, they are not inviting people to take some small action. What you need to do with social media is not only post your own material, you also have to request commentary, you also have to engage in conversation and not only that, you have to go onto other social media properties and engage in the conversation elsewhere." Traditionally, the only point of contact between a patient and the ophthalmologist was by phone. According to Solar, one of the key things to remember in the new era of social media is that the job of an ophthalmology practice staff member who may answer the phone, is not just to answer the phone but to also engage in the conversation on social media in, giving them the tools to interact with patients where they want to talk. "For example," he says, "in the past we had our practices in a specific location and people had to come to that specific location to talk to us after they had telephoned us for an appointment. These days with the internet and social media we have the ability to interact with people in so many different areas and that is what they expect from us. Long gone are the days when the only way of handling patients was on the telephone." ASK QUESTIONS Solar also stresses the importance of engaging with patients through online questionnaires. "This helps ophthalmologists to understand what the patient's issues are, how they assess their vision now and what kinds of problems they have. Once they fill in that form, we guide them with logic to proceed to whether or not they are qualified to go ahead with a consultation or whether we should guide them to another location or another service or just some general information online about what they might need. That way we are using the internet to triage people before we invite them to a consultation. That helps us to exclude people who are not suitable for consultation and it also helps us to educate people so that by the time they get to the consultation they are well-informed." When patients are shopping online, one of the first questions they will want answered is how much will these goods or services cost? Some ophthalmologists may be reluctant to have this conversation for both practical and ethical reasons, but Solar says it's important to be upfront about the costs of specific procedures. "The surgeons I work with value quality over quantity and being upfront about yours costs, in my opinion, is a mechanism for demonstrating your quality," he says. "Some people may equate cost with quality. If they see something with a low price tag, they will immediately assume that the quality is poor. If they see something with a higher price, they will assume that the quality is sufficient to warrant that higher price." * Rod Solar, is Director of Practice Development Consulting of LiveseySolar. This article is based on a EuroTimes Eye Contact interview available on the ESCRS Player at https://player.escrs.org/eurotimes-eye-contact/how-can-i-market-my-ophthalmic-practice-rodsolar-paris-2019

Tags: marketing, practice management, social media

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