

LESSONS FROM THE ANIMAL KINGDOM



Why refractive surgeons should cooperate, not compete.

BY ROD SOLAR AND LAURA LIVESEY

Wild animals have developed sophisticated ways to thrive in their environments. Some species survive through tough competition, whereas others succeed by working together. Refractive surgeons face an underpenetrated market, with only 5% to 10% of potential patients having had surgery. Surgeons can learn from examining cooperative animals such as honeybees and wolves and contrasting them with competitive animals such as lions and stags. These comparisons reveal the benefits of cooperation in the field of refractive surgery.

COOPERATIVE ANIMALS AND THEIR SUCCESS STORIES

Honeybees: The Power of Collective Effort

Honeybees epitomize cooperation. Each bee has a specific role that supports the hive's survival. Worker bees gather nectar, guard bees protect the hive, and nurse bees care for the young. The division of labor and unwavering cooperation ensure the hive's productivity and longevity.

Wolves: Hunting in Packs

Wolves hunt in packs and use coordinated strategies to take down prey much larger than themselves. By working together, they can efficiently feed the entire pack, ensuring the survival of all members. Wolves' social structure and teamwork are crucial to their success as top predators.

Ants: Complex Social Structures

Ant colonies are marvels of cooperation. Each ant has a role—from foraging to defending the colony to nurturing the young. United, millions

of members achieve tasks that individual efforts cannot complete.

COMPETITIVE ANIMALS AND THEIR STRUGGLES

Lions: The Battle for Dominance

Male lions compete fiercely for dominance within a pride. The winner gains breeding rights but must continually defend his position against challengers. The constant competition can lead to injury and stress, often weakening the pride's overall strength.

Stags: Seasonal Conflicts

During the mating season, male stags battle for the right to mate. The strongest may win, but the fights waste energy and can cause severe injuries, even death, which harms the herd's health.

APPLYING THESE LESSONS TO REFRACTIVE SURGERY

A team approach can benefit both surgeons and patients. Following are five reasons why cooperation among refractive surgeons makes more sense than competition.

Lesson No. 1 (From Honeybees): Expand the Market Together

Bees work together to gather enough nectar to sustain the whole hive. Similarly, refractive surgeons can expand their market by cooperating. Ophthalmologists can form alliances to run joint marketing campaigns that educate the public about the benefits and safety of refractive surgery. Cooperative marketing can reduce individual costs while increasing the overall patient base, benefiting all participating surgeons.

Lesson No. 2 (From Wolves): Share Best Practices

Wolves share hunting strategies and care for each other's young, ensuring the pack's survival. Surgeons already attend regular meetings, both locally and online, to share successful techniques, case studies, and new research. By including cooperative business practices, physicians can create a shared database of knowledge that raises everyone's standard of care. Surgeons who stay up to date on the latest advances and share their experiences can offer better care, leading to higher patient satisfaction and more referrals.

Lesson No. 3 (From Ants): Address Common Challenges

Ants work together to protect their colony, gather food, and overcome challenges. Refractive surgeons can use existing meetings to address concerns about insurance coverage, regulatory hurdles, and access to new technologies. Membership societies can lobby for favorable policies and share resources for research and development. A unified approach can more effectively influence policy changes and negotiate with insurance companies and governments, benefiting all surgeons.

Lesson No. 4 (From Dolphins): Build a Supportive Community

Dolphins help injured or sick members of their pod. The creation of networks through professional groups, online forums, and regular social gatherings allows surgeons to seek advice, mentorship, and emotional support. Refractive surgeons with

strong support networks are less likely to burn out and more likely to stay engaged with and passionate about their work.

Lesson No. 5 (From Meerkats): Focus on Value Propositions

Meerkats take turns watching for predators, allowing others to forage safely. Each meerkat's role is vital and unique. Surgeons should focus on identifying their customer avatar (ie, representation of their ideal customer) instead of competing on price or basic services. This approach allows practitioners to develop and offer unique value propositions and cater to specific patient needs. Specialization can set a practice apart, make it attractive to patients seeking specific solutions, reduce direct competition, and increase referrals.

Cultivating a Cooperative Future

In nature, cooperation can promote survival and prosperity. A cooperative approach by refractive surgeons can grow the market, improve patient outcomes, raise the standard of care, and strengthen professional bonds. By focusing on skills development, education, and knowledge sharing, surgeons can address common challenges and build better business networks. A thriving, cooperative ecosystem benefits both physicians and patients. ■

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