Eye Center South on
Recruiting Physicians to the Practice

Administrators often play a central role when physician partners decide to bring on a new doctor, including dealing with many aspects of integrating the doctor into the practice once s/he is hired (see feature article, p. 48). Robert K. Dienethal, CEO of Eye Center South, has actively managed that process, noting “there’s lots of homework to be done on the front end.”

We were curious about that homework, especially since the practice he manages is large (five offices in three states). For instance, is a potential hire selected for a specific location or expected to work in all locations, and does that make a difference in how Eye Center South approaches the interviewing and selection process?

“We feel that there is benefit to rotating our subspecialists through all of our locations,” Dienethal said. “We are upfront with candidates about this so they realize there is going to be some travel involved.”

Here’s a window into the recruiting process at Eye Center South, including how Dienethal involves staff in assessing candidates.

**AE:** How involved do you, as an administrator, get in recruiting new doctors to the practice?

**RD:** The Board and I work as a team. Once the decision is made to recruit, I will typically initiate the search with the recruiting firm and handle the initial phone interviews with potential candidates. I am also heavily involved with coordinating the visits for face-to-face interviews and setting up a thorough agenda so the candidates leave with all of the information on our practice and the community that they need to make a decision.

**AE:** What’s been your most useful question when interviewing a potential MD hire?

**RD:** Eye Center South is a referral center, so it is important for us to know how comfortable a candidate is working and co-managing with optometry.

**AE:** You mentioned that “fit” is an incredibly important part of whether a new doctor will be successful in the practice, saying “the biggest mistake is to be impressed by credentials and ignore the fit part.” How do you assess fit before you see a doc in action?

**RD:** For me, this is the most difficult part. We tend to involve our doctors, admin, and department heads during the face-to-face interviews so we can get varied input and feedback. We also spend a fair amount of time talking to past associates and those who might have trained with the candidate to get a feel for their personality and if the candidate is a team player. Of course, there is no foolproof way to assess “fit” and I
certainly have been fooled on a few occasions, for example by physicians saying all the right things at the interview, then behaving differently once they were on board.

**AE:** You also noted that there’s a lot of paperwork—what are some tips for doing it efficiently?

**RD:** We keep a comprehensive checklist on our shared server that tracks responsible parties and deadlines, etc. We also meet monthly to discuss progress on licensing, hospital privileges, credentialing, etc., so we can stay on top of everything.

**AE:** What is your practice focusing on now ... and what’s next on the horizon?

**RD:** Eye Center South has gone through a fair amount of growth in the last 2 years. We are focusing on managing that growth and improving efficiencies. We still have a fair amount of capacity in our main location and we are actively looking to add dermatology/Mohs [surgery for skin cancer] to our practice because we feel that is a perfect compliment to our ocular plastics.