

Lesson Plans



New Education Options Abound for Today's ECPs

BY JEFF HOPKINS / CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

For the optical industry, continuing education isn't just something you do on a weekend. It is a need that never goes away. Optical technologies change, new vision issues and clinical approaches emerge, and practices are always in search of ways to increase customer satisfaction and profitability.

And as competitive pressures increase and patient solutions become more sophisticated, the demand for quality training and education only increases. In other words, continuing education fills a continual need.

Fortunately, access to continuing education (CE) has never been better. More industry players are providing CE through more channels than ever before. While educational approaches are diverse, they generally take four basic forms.

Live Full-Day(s) Events. These provide the opportunity to get multiple course hours in a concentrated way. They tend to draw industry experts as instructors. Some also serve as mini trade shows, allowing you to see the latest from the suppliers that sponsor the meeting. And they all give you the chance to get off the "island" of your practice and compare notes with your peers.

Live Evening Events. Suppliers sometimes organize national tours to talk about a new type of tech-

nology or an issue that is topical among ECPs. Some of these offer CE credit, others are product-specific presentations. Either way, they tend to offer cocktails and a nice dinner. How can you resist an event that nourishes your mind and your stomach at the same time?

Webinars and Podcasts. While live events give you the opportunity to get away from your daily concerns, online programs offer convenience. Live webinars offer the opportunity to ask the speaker questions just as you might at a live event, and they are usually available for download in case you miss them live.

Online courses. This option allows you to learn whenever you want to. Most have evolved from a series of slides to include narration, animation and even a degree of "gamification" (meaning "making it into a game," which apparently takes too long to say if you're a busy training expert), to make them more engaging. Many of these break the learning into short, bite-sized mini-courses, allowing you to watch whenever you have a few spare moments.

This feature explores some of the specific educational resources available to you from vendors and professional alliances you may already be working with. And while not all of these opportunities are free, none will require you to take out a student loan.

Labs Show Customer Support

Making your practice as successful as it can be is a top priority for your lab. There are sound business reasons for them to want that, but there's more to it. For most practices, the relationship with the lab is the closest and the most important in terms of day-to-day operations.

That relationship is the lifeblood of the lab, and providing education is one way they can demonstrate their support. A daylong educational program is also a way to bring customers together to show their appreciation for everything you do for them. Sadly, there aren't as many lab-sponsored education days as there used to be, but here are some that are still going strong.

Cherry Optical

Cherry's What's New University is an institution in the lab's hometown of Green Bay, Wisconsin. So what better place to hold it than at Lambeau Field, the home of Green Bay's greatest institution, the Green Bay Packers. The event, now in its 15th year, is held annually in March and is the largest single-day optical industry event in the nation. The 2016 program included 51 courses for a total of 60 hours of class time.

Continued on page 30

Lesson Plans

Continued from page 28

With COPE, ABO, NCLE, AOA and CPC credits available, everyone in the practice can learn something. Courses range from the latest in optical technology to lessons practices can learn from other industries. And if you don't get enough of What's New from the classes, you can hear more from the 150-plus exhibitors displaying their products and services.

More information: www.whatsnew.university

Diversified Ophthalmic

Diversified's Eyes of America educational events are a 30-year tradition in the lab's hometown of Cincinnati. These meetings take place three times per year. Programs for optometrists take place in the spring and summer, and offer nine hours of CE. A fall session is targeted to opticians, and offers six credit hours of CE.

The optometric meetings are always co-sponsored by a school or college of optometry, and the Ohio State Board of Examiners in Optometry typically approves the program for optometric CE credit. While COPE credit is not available, most of the state optometry boards credit the hours because they are pre-approved by one of the schools or colleges of optometry.

The optometric programs usually include at least four hours of pharmacological/therapeutic credit, with the remaining hours covering contact lens and corneal topics, ophthalmic optics, nutrition, and eye-related systemic disease issues. According to Palmer Cook, OD, Diversified's vice president of practice enrichment, "We try to select speakers who present 'take-it-to-the-practice-and-use-it-tomorrow' topics." A limited number of vendors exhibit at the optometric events, in accordance with COPE guidelines.

The optician/technician programs now offer two hours of contact lens-related discussion, which is now required for Ohio opticians who hold spectacle-dispensing licenses. The other four hours cover issues related to spectacle lens and eyewear technology and dispensing.

More information: www.eyesofamerica.org

Walman Optical

"Knowing what's next has never been more important," said Meg Klaers, Walman's product manager of marketing. To fill the need, Walman offers extensive educational opportunities through its Walman University and its partner, ADO Practice Solutions.

Walman U typically holds eight events per year, in locations as geographically (and climatically) separate as Minnesota and Arizona. These one-day sessions are held on Friday or Saturday.

A typical Walman University offers six ABO (some technical), four COPE and two NCLE courses. Offerings may differ depending on the regional and state license requirements. With topics ranging from blue light to increasing patient loyalty, events can draw as many as 350 ECPs.

Education from Walman's ADO Practice Solutions division is designed to help ECPs "increase their long-term profitability and help them thrive in the ever-changing optometric industry." This is accomplished through evening and one-day meetings targeting doctors and key staffers.

Classes are taught by eyecare industry experts, fellow eyecare professionals and business professionals from outside the industry. The meetings also have a networking component in which sharing of best practices is encouraged.

Events focus on practice-management topics like attracting new patients, billing and the implications of medical optometry. The meetings also provide resources that help practices successfully execute the best-practice methods described in the presentations.

More information: www.walmanoptical.com/resources/education

Presentations From Suppliers

Most lens suppliers don't sell even a single pair to a consumer: all of their sales come through you. And they know that for you to dispense a sophisticated product like a customized progressive, you need to understand it, be confident in it, and communicate its benefits in patient language. That means providing product-specific training, and often, accredited education about vision problems, new technology and

dispensing techniques.

In this regard, it's important to remember that for-credit courses aren't the only ones worth attending. You've probably sat through a presentation that was a thinly disguised sales pitch, and you know how off-putting that can be. Fortunately, most suppliers know that too, so they make sure their non-accredited presentations educate you about the technology they're offering and the issues that they address.

Carl Zeiss Vision

Zeiss strives to provide easy, fun "no-frills" education that gives attendees the knowledge and tools needed to offer the best eyecare solutions, manage staff and grow profits.

In the past year, Zeiss has delivered over 150,000 person-hours of education in various live venues, according to the company. About 40 percent were offered for continuing education credit, and included topics ranging from lens technology to ANSI standards, HIPAA and managed care.

The company's live education programs include in-office training, and local events that offer eight hours of ABO, NCLE and JCAHPO credits. These include two-day "Optical Boot Camps" held in various cities around the country.

Through sponsorships and educational grants, Zeiss provides continuing education at local and national meetings, along with joint efforts like a recent national blue light education tour.

In the past year, the company has also offered a 10-city "Crafting Success" road show. Held in craft breweries, this tour highlighted parallels between the microbrew and eyecare industries, in their strategies for brand differentiation and business growth.

For online learners, the company offers Zeiss Academy Vision Care, which provides self-paced,



Continued on page 32

Lesson Plans

Continued from page 30

interactive courses, with about 900 ECPs currently using the program.

More information: academy-visioncare.zeiss.com

Essilor

Under the banner of the company's ECP University, Essilor offers a variety of live and e-learning opportunities, with something for everyone in the practice. The online Practice and Staff Fundamentals program, available through one or two-year subscriptions, offers over 100 training modules. Courses feature training appropriate for a range practice functions and levels of experience, and some offer CE credits.

ECPU also offers a fee-based ABO Exam Prep program, which provides self-paced learning and comprehensive knowledge checks, so learners can assess their progress and identify further study needs as they prepare.

For practice employees in a management position, ECPU has a comprehensive six-month training course called the Management Development Program (MDP). This program combines live instruction with online courses, supplemented by personalized coaching and project-based learning. Each class meets three

times for two-day sessions at Essilor's Dallas headquarters during the six-month training period.

Finally, Essilor hosts four to six live Management Business Academy sessions in cities around the U.S. These one-day courses are designed help practice owners increase their success by through tracking and understanding key performance indicators.

More information: www.ecpu.com

Hoya Vision Care

Hoya sees continuing education as a way of teaching eyecare professionals about advances in lens technology and lens processing, and through these efforts, demonstrating their support for eyecare practices.

Educational content includes presentations about Hoya products and technology, as well as non-product-specific COPE and ABO presentations. These are offered on an ad hoc basis at the request of larger practices, optometric alliances and local, state and regional meetings. Hoya also provides educational grants in support of association meetings.

In total, the company provides about 40 ABO hours and 15 COPE hours of live education. Topics for accredited and non-accredited courses include specific product training, lens technology and dispensing. Position-of-wear training was recently added to help ECPs understand the benefits and dispensing requirements of this technology.

Hoya reaches ECPs nationwide through webinars, live events and its online, specialized for education portal, EmpowerU. The platform, created and powered by Jobson, currently offers 98 courses that assist Hoya accounts in onboarding new employees, learning about Hoya Technology and how those ideas can be applied to practices. Eight ABO approved courses can be taken for free for-credit education.

More information: learning.hoyavision.com

Luxottica

Noting the "dramatic change" in the optical industry in recent times, Alessandro Baronti, vice president, industry relations and education, stated that "Luxottica is committed to providing the knowledge and tools our customers need to not only embrace the change but reach a greater business potential."

The company pursues this goal through live events and webinars. These are delivered at the request of professional associations, organizations and alliances. So far this year, Luxottica has conducted over 80 events reaching over 5,000 eyecare professionals. Additional events are scheduled every week through the end of 2016.

Luxottica currently offers nine educational segments, including ABO as well as non-accredited courses. ABO courses are available online as webinars through a portal powered by *20/20 Magazine*. This coursework places a strong emphasis on retailing and finding new opportunities for the optical. Two COPE

courses are also in the approval process.

For more information email:
luxacademy@us.luxottica.com

Shamir Insight

Shamir Insight is launching a continuing education portal designed to help eyecare professionals better serve their patients. The portal offers staff education in both new technology as well as refresher courses. The site is now live at www.quantumoptical.com/shamirCEPortal with free access to all ECPs.

The portal contains 21 self-guided presentations that provide the latest information on Shamir products, education certifications and industry updates, all in one centralized location.

"This will be a beneficial tool for onboarding, keeping up with the latest information and as a refresher," said Pam Benson Gibson, Shamir's director of education, adding that the presentations cover a wide variety of topics including practice management, optics and managed vision care.

In addition to Shamir's education modules and in conjunction with Quantum Optical, for a small fee, the portal also offers over 90 courses for CE credits including four COPE courses.

Shamir launched its Vitamin See (www.thevitaminsee.com) blog last year to provide ECPs with useful information and key business strategies. The company is working on developing a similar portal for labs which it said will be released soon.

More information: www.quantumoptical.com/shamirCEPortal

VSP Optics Group

The centerpiece of VSP's training offering is the online uUniversity. Recognizing the constant need for training resulting from staff turnovers, uUniversity is a free training platform for employees who are new to dispensing, or looking to grow and

Continued on page 34



Lesson Plans

Continued from page 32

expand their knowledge of optics.

The training takes the form of self-paced, on-demand optical training in fun, 10-minute video modules designed to get new dispensers quickly up to speed. In total, there are nearly 30 courses, covering topics including the optics of the eye, light and refraction, basic lens types, prescriptions, lens materials, blue light, taking lens measurements and solutions based dispensing.

uUniversity also includes training that helps ECPs become more confident with fitting VSP's Unity lenses, reducing re-dos and allowing patients to get their eyewear sooner.

In addition, VSP offers an extensive program of live educational events. The schedule for 2017 events is currently in development.

More information: www.opticaltrainingforu.com



CE for Members of Professional Alliances

Many years ago, practice owners began to realize that by banding together, they could increase their purchasing power and secure better pricing. But today, to call these organizations “buying groups” doesn’t begin to capture what they’re about.

Many have realized that continually improving the management of the practice—and sharpening the skills of its doctors, dispensers and techs—is even more important than lower prices. As a result they offer a formidable range of educational opportunities to their members.

IDOC

According to Stephanie Sheets, IDOC’s director of marketing, “The goal for our CE programs is to bring the best speakers from inside and outside of the optical industry to present new and unique courses in practice development and in medical eyecare.” IDOC fulfills

the goal through educational opportunities on national, regional and local levels, as well as in the home or office through webinars.

Annual meetings are held twice per year—in the West in the fall, and the East in the winter. They typically last three days and feature about 15 hours of CE credit. Additionally, the organization offers two one-day regional meetings (West in the spring, and East in the winter) typically offering five hours of credit.

To reach members locally, IDOC offers over 300 dinner meetings, called study groups, per year. Webinars are offered to members who use the organization’s consulting services.

National and regional meetings feature COPE and ABO credits on medical and practice management topics, for both doctors and staff. Recently added topics include managed vision care, ICD-10 coding, blue light and practice design.

More information: www.idoc.net/Site/Education

Primary Eyecare Network (PEN)

Providing high-quality, relevant education goes to the heart of PEN’s strategy and core values. To this end, the organization employs a board of doctors, and surveys its membership extensively.

This has allowed them to segment their membership in order to target education by practice and individual needs. One result is the realization that large and small practices have very different educational priorities.

PEN provides over 100 hours of live CE per year. Some are recurring events, such as an annual update on coding and billing held in January and repeated in four cities.

Three-day, hands-on paraoptometric workshops are also held annually in Northern and Southern California. According to the organization’s education calendar, ABO seminars on subjects like lensometry, frame selection and office skills are held frequently.

All events are open to non-members of PEN at a slightly higher fee. The organization recognizes the importance of getting ECPs away from the office, gen-

erally on weekends, so they can focus on learning and exchange ideas in peer-to-peer setting.

PEN also offers an extensive program of webinars. These follow various tracks, including HR issues and dispensing strategies. Finally, the launch of their “Open Campus” web-based portal is imminent.

More information: www.primaryeye.net

Professional Eye Care Associates of America (PECAA)

PECAA focuses on providing business education opportunities for its members through meetings, webinars and online classes. The centerpiece of this effort is the organization’s annual meeting, held in May at a different site each year.

This two and a half-day meeting is attended by as many as 500 doctors and staff, and includes a trade show where over 60 of PECAA’s vendor partners exhibit. The meeting features five to six hours of CE, including a two-hour clinical workshop presented by Paul Karpecki, OD, PECAA’s clinical director.

Regionally, PECAA offers daylong Optical Merchandising Workshops. Held in the fall and spring, each workshop features five to six hours of CE and is repeated at multiple locations around the country.

PECAA also provides monthly webinars, each presented at lunchtime and again in the evening for the convenience of members. For anytime learning, PECAA offers an online educational program, powered by Quantum Optical, that includes hundreds of course hours for COPE, ABO and NCLE credit.

Live meetings and selected webinars offer COPE or ABO credit, and range from clinical to practice management topics including that hardy perennial, billing and coding.

More information: www.pecaa.com/education

Vision Source

According to president and CEO Jim Greenwood, “with health care delivery evolving from a fee-for-service model to a value-based system, Vision Source recognizes that the provision of consistent, high-quality care and service experience outcomes are fundamental to successful population health management.”

Digital Age Dictates Education Experience

BY MARK MATTISON-SHUPNICK / DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, JOBSON OPTICAL GROUP

The way we learn is rapidly changing, as many educators will attest. In particular, the way educational content is packaged and presented has taken on new dimensions, largely through the influence of the internet. For instance, we've become used to receiving short, quick bites of information that build to a larger view.

The internet has also created the expectation, especially among digital natives, that learning should be entertaining, engaging and available on any electronic device, anywhere, anytime.

In short, our digital world has become learner-centric, and educators who understand that are developing new methods to connect with today's learners. Here are some examples.

Gamification

Gamification is a great descriptor about the way education can be made more effective. Like a game online or in everyday life, being involved in the "how to" or the "why" makes it more memorable. The player's involvement can be as much 90 percent when gamified, as opposed to only 30 percent when taught in a lecture setting using visuals and discussion.



Personalization

Every learner has a different style of absorbing and processing new information, and there are many ways that learning can be made more effective for each individual learner. Digital learning allows the participant to organize and adjust learning tools and course paths so it better meets their learning style and the material is learned sooner and more completely.



Mobile

The ubiquity of smartphones and tablets allows learners to access educational content anytime and anywhere. The mobile device—and the connection to it—automatically recognizes the content and reconfigures it for optimal viewing, improving access and facilitating utilization. Presenting content in shorter, more digestible segments also enhances learning on mobile devices.



Automation

Education materials can be easily assembled by taking advantage of digital tools that enable all the forms of presentation to be combined. Video, audio, text, images, GIFs and more can be completed with the drag and drop tool. Many types of educational software provide easy authoring and hosting tools without the need for a large IT group coding the course work.



Augmented Learning

When education is participatory and the learner is immersed in the course, class or training, the quicker they learn. New augmented and virtual reality systems create an immersive environment that can facilitate learning and even make it fun. Another benefit of these systems is that they be effective for tactile, auditory and visual learners. ■



Vision Source offers extensive educational resources, centered around the annual meeting, called the Vision Source Exchange. In 2016, this meeting attracted almost 1,400 member doctors, plus staff. The Exchange offers free continuing education to members, with the 2016 meeting delivering 24 CE hours for optometrists and eight hours for practice staff.

The curriculum for optometrists focuses on clinical topics, supplemented by courses related to managed care, human resources and other practice management issues. Peer-to-peer interactions are provided through

a series of Learning Labs, and informal meet-ups. The event also includes presentations and exhibit booths from Vision Source vendors, with over 150 participants attending this year.

Vision Source has also created special for-credit programs, both live and online, focused on particular clinical issues. Online resources are also available for practice staff. These include the Vision Source Learning program, which offers training to enhance professional expertise and business skills.

Practices can also download materials for eight

workshop programs, called Spotlights, focused on a particular topic relating to practice performance.

More information: www.vstheexchange.com

While the pace of change in our industry can seem overwhelming, and the need to stay current can seem a chore, it's never been easier to get the education you need to keep up. From all-day live events to 10-minute interactive online modules, continuing education isn't just everywhere—it's anytime. It can be social, it can be fun—and above all, it's stimulating. ■