

VM
TRAILBLAZERS
 Portraits in Industry Leadership

MyEyeDr. Scales to Elevate Both Eyecare and the Patient Experience



BY MARGE AXELRAD / SENIOR VP, EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

From its origins in October 2001, created by a team out to combine hands-on vision care, managed care expertise and optical retail experience with operational know-how, the vision for MyEyeDr. was different. The goal was to create a new business model, one that would emphasize, as the name implied, the doctor's credibility to patients and consumers at a time when the industry was moving from a mid 80s-to-90s "one-hour optical" trend to one that could more expertly manage the onset of managed vision care which was starting to grow rapidly across the country.

The idea was to help doctors concentrate on serving patients while an experienced team would bring operational investment and expertise into the premium eyecare equation.

As the company rapidly grew, via the backing of increasingly larger private equity partners, at its different stages MyEyeDr. has been able to rapidly and consistently expand by providing a transition solution to one-and-two-unit practices as well as some of the U.S. business' more prominent regional

professional eyecare leaders. And its Capital Vision Services organization would be expanded to better operate the evolving organization.

As co-founder Sue Downes explained to VM back in 2014 when the company had 46 locations, "Our vision was to make a business that was doctor-driven, a total vision concept." MyEyeDr. wanted to convey to independent practice founders and owners "that we have the operational excellence in our space."

Today, primarily under the MyEyeDr. banner, the company is exceeding 820 offices, the company's services and infrastructure team and employees now includes a majority of patient facing doctors and associates as well as a behind-the-scenes services organization focusing on operations, systems, product management, merchandising, inventory and technology, and strategic planning.

The company's footprint spans 27 states, working to create a "one-family" culture which is building new career paths for doctors and associates. It is also putting new types of talent and skill sets in place with experienced senior leadership additions from other fields. Backed by Goldman Sachs, the

goal is to create a modern eye health business, CEO Downes tells VM, to "elevate the role of eye health and the patient experience." The company just marked its 20th anniversary last fall.

This special inaugural VM Trailblazers feature will look at MyEyeDr.'s (MED) current perspective, its growth and expansion milestones and several new initiatives. We'll take a look at MED's optometric and clinical professional organization, its new professional programs, the rise of medical optometry and new energy behind routine eyecare along with its social, DEI and community efforts. We'll also take a look at MED's private equity evolution and its strategic long-term commitments to the future. ■

A NOTE to VM READERS

VM TRAILBLAZERS: Portraits in Industry Leadership is a new editorial initiative, which will be done on a select basis during the year. The goal is to provide an exclusive, deeper dive into some of today's leading eyecare and optical companies, innovators and organizations.

MyEyeDr. Puts the Focus on Customizing the Patient Experience and Educating Associates

BY MARGE AXELRAD / SENIOR VP, EDITORIAL DIRECTOR AND MARK TOSH / SENIOR EDITOR

NEW YORK—Today's MyEyeDr., as an organization, is certainly different in scale and size from its origins 20-plus years ago. As co-founder and the CEO leading its vision and execution for the majority of those years, Sue Downes describes the continuously updated business to VM this way: "We're bringing independent optometrists together, we're bringing the medical model together and we have a unified name with a strong operational structure. Because of our elevated position, because of the parameters that we have, the states that we operate in, we can actually lead the industry in elevating eyecare into a medical eyecare space. And create a best in class retail experience as well."

She continued, "We are at 820 offices today. And we have to leverage the best practices that we've learned even while we continue to revamp and build for our future growth. There's so much new technology and a range of interesting things out there, today's leading companies have really got to have your work processes and your people, the right talent aligned and that you're utilizing technology to help serve your teams and patients in the right way for now and for the future."

For example, she noted, "in the earlier days of MyEyeDr., when the initial goal was to really simplify the managed vision care experience for patients, we used to have routing slips so that when somebody came in we knew exactly what insurance they had, what they were entitled to, and how we and they could get the most out of those benefits."

"Today, though, we have to be several steps ahead of this and employ new tech to help us go that route. We recognize that we have to talk to the patient before they even come in about what insurance they have. We have to make sure that they're connected to the proper visit, we have to make sure that the staff today has a 'pre-capture' understanding of every patient that's coming in, what are they coming in for? What were issues they had before that we need to address for their eyecare health needs this visit? Did they love



Sue Downes, CEO, MyEyeDr.

certain frames? Did they need to adjust to contact lenses—in other words, how can we customize their visit differently than we did before?"

Customizing Patient Encounters and Educating Associates

Asking these types of questions has implications for the MED teams, executives, managers, doctors and associates. Downes pointed out, "We have to deploy these differently because of the scape and scope of our operations. We definitely think a great deal about our associates. How do they deliver care? How can we make it easier for them to serve our patients?"

"Our patients want more today than they wanted 10 years ago, or five years ago. And so we have to make it easier for our associates to understand how to serve them better. Patients are more educated about managed care than they were before. They're more educated about product, even though many have much to learn about real product distinctions, but this is an opportunity and the development of

our people is an important direction for us."

As a result of changing customer/patient expectations and needs, MyEyeDr., too, is revisiting how the offices view that transition of the patient from doctor in the exam room to the retail side of the office. Downes said, "What the doctor does in the exam lane translates to you not only seeing better and enjoying your life better. We've all had a greater need for glasses, especially during COVID, because we're looking at each other via monitors or looking at screens so much, our eyes are tired and strained. Our expectation is that we can take your experience from the doctor and we can really extend it to make sure the doctor's recommendations are matched with what you see in our retail experience."

She emphasized, "We do think that it's got to be fun, right? It's got to be interactive. We also want to show our expertise on helping you truly find the best frame the best lenses that fit you, your budget and your lifestyle and be able to highlight those. We look at a lot of data, too, to help in our planning."

"We have the privilege of buying practices and partnering with them where we ask what types of patients are they catering to and what's worked best for them? We use analytics and our own experience to understand and work with our vendors, employ heat maps to put together a curated frame selection, we try to go as wide and deep as we possibly can. So I have to comment about all the frame vendors because I think they've done a really great job of having a lot of uniqueness, color, shape and design so that we can go forward to understand ethnicity, average household income, and more about particular groups of patients within a market."

"We then put together a curated frame selection, but we really want to be sure we are tailoring a mix for the clientele of each office. We've got some offices that are focused on luxury depending on their history and where they're based, others

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MyEyeDr.'s Sue Downes Speaks to Expanding Clinical Expertise

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that we call 'core' with some luxury included, and more recently we are seeing interest in other more mainstream products and price points as some private practices in certain markets choose to adjust their mix and we can serve new priorities and price points. At the same time, we're starting to look at how we can present the best lens choices and options, ways that we can help patients make the best choices for both their frames and their lenses."

Building an Optometry Organization and Expanding Clinical Expertise

MyEyeDr.'s optometry organization has also been a major focus. Downes asks, "What about the future of medical optometry? We've been in business for over 20 years and we've gone out and talked actively about the fact that we are your insurance provider, we're your insurance expert, we know how to help you understand your insurance, and maximize your benefits because vision benefits are very different than health insurance.

"We encourage the patient to understand how they might want to redeem their vision insurance and get the most for it—we've measured our reputation here and we've done a good job for that. In the past two challenging years, we do note the start of a changing mind shift, and a changing of the consumer to understand: 'I'm not worried about my deductible, I'm not worried about my co-payment, I actually want to redeem this because I paid for this benefit.'"

Downes said, "But at the same time our health insurance or health visits or medical eye conditions and cases have continued to climb in these past two years. And so we're not using our traditional vision, we're using your health, your traditional health insurance for those visits.

"One thing that we're noticing is that our business doesn't start and stop with just routine eyecare or a pair of glasses. We are eye doctors and are seeing that primary care physicians are short staffed, and we're seeing a pent-up demand where people didn't go to many offices for primary care during



(L to R back row) David Edwards, chief of staff; Christina Perraud, VP planning and purchasing; David Wolff, general counsel; Noam Schildhaus, director strategic initiatives; Andrew Wong, VP strategic initiatives; Scott Allison, VP professional services; Tony Caskey, COO; Yogish Survarna, chief information officer (CIO); Angela McCoy, chief integrations & patient solutions officer; Bob Teixeira, chief financial officer (CFO). (L to R front row) Billy Murray, EVP practice transitions; Sue Downes, CEO; Noha Abdalla, chief marketing officer (CMO); Vanessa Bernarding, EVP human resources; Not pictured: Dr. Artis Beatty, chief medical officer.

the pandemic. In the exam room and with our doctors, patients are understanding from them that we can help them take care of an eye infection or identify perhaps the beginning of glaucoma or see the start of a cataract or address their suffering from dry eye after staring at computers all day long and not blinking like we should be.

"We know that we are not just retailers, we are health care-plus-optical, we believe strongly that the health care has to come first. MyEyeDr.'s professional team asks, how do we help our patients live a better life? So we are putting forward both messages. We are talking to our patients 'did you know,' 'look out for this' understand the importance of regular eye exams, what is an eye health exam versus a refraction. We're still having fun with the product. But it has to start with the health care."

Advocating All Stakeholders to Expand Education About Eye Health

Downes sees a need for stakeholders across the eyecare field to raise understanding about eye health. "Unfortunately, we are still at a bad place—and many consumers are less educated about their eyecare than they are about their dental care. COVID is changing attitudes. We've got to figure out how to get into whether it's schools, employer groups, health plans, we've got to help them understand the importance of an eye health examination.

"And what the difference is between that and a refraction. Right now, we are seeing more and more things online—and sometimes these technologies can be powerful to help people via screening, but we have to be careful here and to make sure it's not confused that that is an eye exam. And to emphasize

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The Role Private Equity Plays in the Expansion of MyEyeDr.

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the other health conditions that could be going on with a person's health that are being overlooked.”

When asked about the role of private equity in MyEyeDr.'s expansion, Downes stated, “Listen, of course, I don't think we'd be as big as we are, and where we are today, without our all of our partners from private equity, right? They brought us different things, whether it was kind of growing up as a company and having some governance or financial and operational infrastructure. Those are internal things.

“But of late, what it's really helped us with has been consumer awareness trends, tapping into our IT strategy, better understanding what's happening in health care. We have resources that enable us to examine our future needs and our future growth. Yes, they have deep pockets and a lot of smart people. I think if you embrace it you can bring that intel into your organization—bringing your teams together, creating development opportunities, growing in new markets. We're able to have the performance that continues the private equity trail of wanting people to be invested with us—because in today's climate, you have to have strong organic growth, you have to have a strong base.

“But, to me, we're not just trying to simply hit the next financial hurdle, or have the next partner transaction. We're also building the industry, we talked about consumer awareness, we're building digital experiences for our associates and our patients. We're investing in research and technology within the industry and outside of the industry to help the industry. So we feel we're growing the category, we're not just here to make another private equity transaction.

“And, this is where I think the industry and, really the country, needs to hold private equity more responsible, because they do have a lot of power and a lot of money and a lot of Intel, we should help them now to make the health care system better. Having private equity partners only helps us to prepare for the future disruptions and thinking about eyecare delivery differently. When we look at



(L to R) Yogish Survarna, chief information officer (CIO); Christina Perraud, VP planning and purchasing; Noha Abdalla, chief marketing officer (CMO); Vanessa Bernarding, EVP human resources; Sue Downes, CEO; Bob Teixeira, chief financial officer (CFO).



(L to R) David Edwards, chief of staff; Noam Schildhaus, director strategic initiatives; Andrew Wong, VP of strategic initiatives.



(L to R) Angela McCoy, chief integrations & patient solutions officer; Dr. Scott Allison, VP professional services; Sue Downes, CEO; Noha Abdalla, chief marketing officer; Tony Caskey, chief operating officer (COO); Yogish Survarna, chief information officer (CIO).

the medical eyecare segment, when we look beyond routine care, we see that our patients' needs today are different than they were 10 years ago. “

MyEyeDr. today, Downes points out, is still a team of people, probably close to 85 percent, who are in the field, in offices “forward-facing” patients,

while another 15 percent are behind the scenes “to support the associate experience and the journey to help deliver care. We're really in a people business. We've got new positions in our company and will have other new ones in the future.

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Goldman Sachs' Jo Natauri on the Health Care Opportunity for MyEyeDr.

BY MARGE AXELRAD / SENIOR VP, EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

NEW YORK—Goldman Sachs' investment in MyEyeDr./Capital Vision Services was announced in June 2019 and closed in August of that year, representing the start of a major new chapter in what MyEyeDr.'s future platform could be. In early January 2020, when *Vision Monday* met with CEO Sue Downes and Goldman's Jo Natauri, at that time the global head of health care investing for the Goldman Merchant Banking Division, the vision was to amplify MED's efforts to put the patient experience front and center and to raise vision care's profile and awareness among patients and other provider groups in the health care field.

No one could anticipate that a few short months later, an unprecedented global pandemic would put so many lives and business plans in the U.S. and around the world on hold as the world stopped and gradually adjusted to a new kind of reality. That being said, with more than two years of solid learnings and a strong pace of expansion that took place throughout the pandemic, particularly in 2021, Downes' and Natauri's original vision for the group is still intact.

Back in that first interview, Natauri said, "We identified, nearly two years before we were in the process with Sue, that optometry was a real area of opportunity. It is in line with what we saw in many trends happening throughout the health care space. There's a greater consciousness about cost, about how primary care can bring a greater patient experience. And how optometry encounters patients' health issues early.

"With the advent of technology, consumers will be making more of their own decisions, interacting with doctors and practices in new ways. Through all of health care, we have to be able to deliver outcomes to patients and there will be a big sea change in referring patients for care overall. We saw that what MyEyeDr. had achieved and the scale they achieved lends itself to that future health care perspective more than any other platform out there. Enabling optometrists to practice



Jo Natauri

to the scope of their license, not just offering retail solutions, but the combination of both—we're very excited about that balance."

Two years later, in another exclusive *VM* conversation late last month, Natauri, now global head of health care private investing for Goldman Sachs' Asset Management Division, was asked to assess the pandemic's impact and she said, "When you think about health care, and what COVID did, I think we all had to adapt to the fact that we couldn't go into the office anymore to get delivery of health care the way we used to. So, one obvious trend emerging is the adoption of telemedicine within health care which has accelerated a few years because COVID happened, compared to if COVID hadn't happened.

"So that's a big trend and I think health care systems broadly are trying to figure that out. They now understand patients would prefer to be treated at home or are open to new remote ideas—so the question is, how do we deliver that care in an appropriate way? How do we make care more efficient?"

She added, "I don't think we're going to know all the nuances of the pandemic's impact for a few more years in terms of what's going to stick and what's not. But you can bet that the whole health care landscape has changed permanently."

Another point is the rise of new digital technology, and many times the digital tech that was available in the vision space was fragmented in how it functioned. On that topic Natauri said, "Every in-

dustry is going through what it means to embrace digital technology now. It's about digital access and how its going to be applied.

"But in optometry there are some direct implications from the pandemic—having kids stay indoors for two years increases screen time and impacts myopia rates. You may have postponed getting your eye exam in the last two years—what's the fallout of that? So eye health, in particular, I think will continue to be increasingly important coming out of this. I think optometry has an important role to play in terms of figuring it out."

Natauri observed, "As Sue has bolstered her executive team and the organization looks beyond the pandemic, there's a big upside in elevating the message about the value of comprehensive eyecare in the bigger health care picture. Historically, and generally for the industry, those messages have been a little overshadowed by the retail element of the business in general."

Natauri said, "We are becoming a lot more deliberate in terms of the quality of acquisitions we're making. We continue to see the need for consolidation, we think, because of all these things that we talked about the changing landscape which really needs the digital infrastructure now. We think MyEyeDr. can bring a lot to the table for any optometrist thinking about selling their practice. There is a real need for solutions in the marketplace."

Natauri concluded, "At Goldman, we are investors in growth. That's what we do. So the investments we're making now aren't for a quick turnaround. We know what we're good at which is we help think through strategy, we think of growth rivers, we provide resources to companies.

"But we also look for a great management team to execute it, and Sue and her team fits right into the fairway of that thesis. She's been in this industry for such a long time. If you think about the change in this industry, and what she's done to keep up and continue to be a market leader across all of that change, that's not an easy thing to do. But it's how we like to invest and we're happy that she and MyEyeDr. are a part of our family." ■

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MED Expansion: A Timeline of Deals Starting 2014 Through 2021

MyEyeDr.'s expansion push has escalated in recent years and the company does not report on every individual practice it acquires. The company started in the metro D.C./Virginia area, expanding in the surrounding markets over the company's first several years in business.

Beginning in 2014, armed with a minority investment from Monitor Clipper at the time, MED, already at 46 locations, embarked on several more visible acquisition deals, including North Carolina's Doctors Vision Centers and Eye Care Associates.

By 2015, Canada's Altas Partners and Caisse de depot et placement

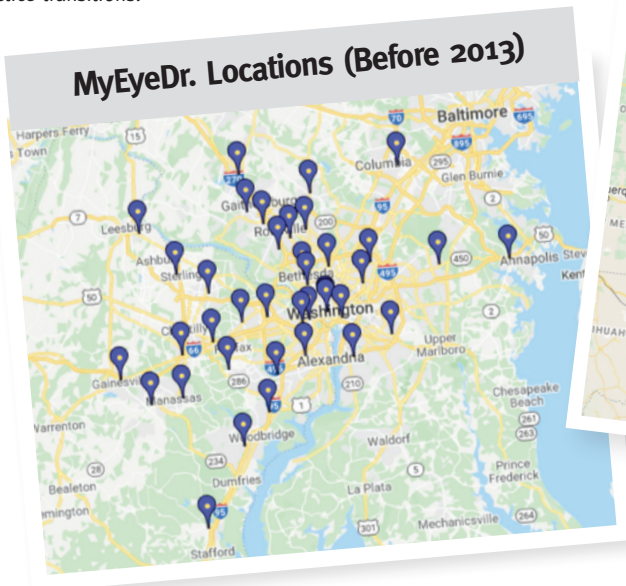
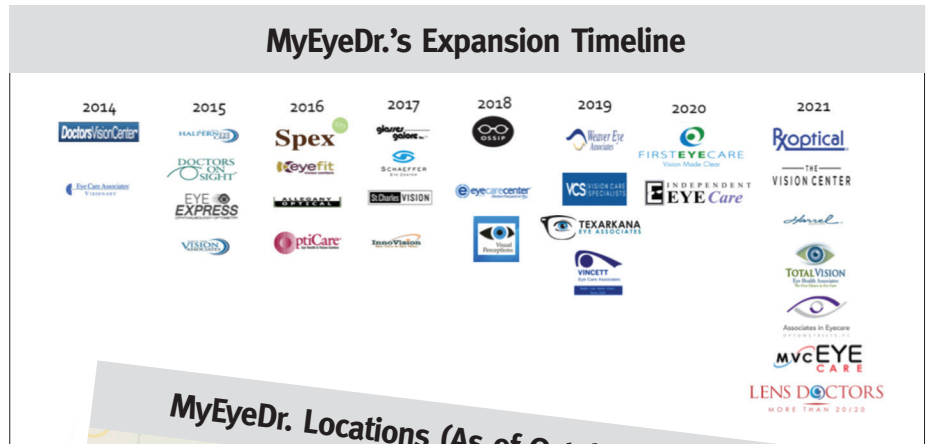
du Quebec joined with MED's management to acquire MyEyeDr. and its Capital Vision Services group. Further deals of high profile optometric groups and practices started to ramp up.

In August 2019, Goldman Sach's Merchant Banking Division acquired the group, with some of the prior investors maintaining a stake, but enabling further acquisitions and a range of new strategic resources and investments.

At the end of 2021, MyEyeDr. stood at approximately 820 offices across 27 states. ■



The MyEyeDr. Practice Transitions Team: (L to R) David Wolff, general counsel; Angela McCoy, chief integrations & patient solutions officer; Sue Downes, CEO; Billy Murray, EVP practice transitions.



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MED Wants ‘Doctors Leading Doctors’ to Guide Clinical and Exam Lane Operations

BY MARK TOSH / SENIOR EDITOR

Big ideas are often borne of simple, straightforward beliefs and the launch, growth and successful expansion of MyEyeDr. into an eyecare powerhouse over the past two decades stands as a prime example of this theory. The company’s mission, in its simplest form, since the beginning has been to bring together a focus on eye health with the expertise that enables patients to see, look and be their best.

At the core of this effort are the roughly 1,400 ODs and other ECPs who work each day to carry out this mission. The success of their efforts—and the way the group address the eyecare opportunity—is shown in the track record MyEyeDr. has established during its two decades of leadership in the areas of optical retail and eyecare for all patients.

“Our focus has really been around how do we make sure that the patient is getting everything that they need, both from a refractive standpoint and also from an overall health care standpoint,” MyEyeDr. chief medical officer Dr. Artis Beatty said in a recent interview with *Vision Monday*. “And when you’re thinking about the health care aspect, how do you make sure that you are maximizing that availability for the patient?”

Thinking about the health care aspect of eyecare is one way that MyEyeDr. opens up new opportunities for both patients and the ODs who become part of the overall company. This comes about whether it’s addressing the more general routine eyecare or working toward expanding the scope of practice in areas often referred to as the field of “medical optometry” in the language of today.

“When we think about optometry in general, we often use that term ‘medical optometry,’ but I don’t know whether it’s really different than what we have been able to do and that we continue to do as optometrists in general,” Dr. Beatty said.

He added, “The work that we are doing is much more around making sure that we have the ability to take care of our patients’ needs no matter what those needs are within this current scope of op-

tometry. And as you know the scope of optometry continues to grow and to change.

“And if I were to think about full-scope care 10 to 12 years ago, I would think about doctors who had the ability to see their patients and to manage the normal course of ocular disease. They would have been managing diabetic health care, managing their patients with glaucoma, and be taking care of their red eyes, their allergy needs, dry eye, and so forth. But they’d be doing it with varying scopes and ability.”

And none of those scopes at that time really included being able to make some of the surgical decisions that doctors are able to make today regarding the use of laser technology for things in and around the eye, as optometrists have been able to do now in multiple states, and that number continues to grow.

Overall, patients and consumers tend to think of their optometrist as “their eye doctor, and whether they need to have their glasses updated or they end up with a red eye or an eye that is irritated or they’ve got glaucoma they just know they come to their eye doctor and they get all that stuff taken care of.”

He added, “We really look at what is the definition of full-scope optometry in the individual states where we have offices and doctors because that does vary. We look at what the doctors in those locations are really interested in providing and do they have any special skill sets that they want to share with the patient population.”

Coming on Board With MyEyeDr.

Dr. Beatty was part of an early MyEyeDr. integration, in 2014 with Eye Care Associates where he was one of the clinical directors within that group. “As we came on with MyEyeDr., the organization was in a transition phase, expanding from the Northern Virginia area and entering North Carolina, where, in general the scope of practice is greater.

“And Sue Downes wanted to have the ability to think differently about all of the services that could be offered in a state that had a fuller scope-of-



Dr. Artis Beatty, MyEyeDr.’s chief medical officer.

practice than in all of the states that she had been operating in previously. I stepped into this role at the time and there we were only about 120 offices or so and I have grown up with the company as the company has continued to grow.”

Today, when a new a new practice comes on board with MyEyeDr., the doctors who had been managing the practice often stay on board. “We want the ODs to stay on board,” Dr. Beatty said. “For the vast majority of practices that we partner with, the OD is becoming a part of the MyEyeDr. family. We want to make sure that we have continuity for patients, and we want to be able to give those doctors different opportunities and give them different resources” without disrupting the patient experience.

Dr. Beatty also noted that some of the ODs who join MyEyeDr., which “most often promotes from within,” tend to move into managerial or leadership roles.

“When we think about our leadership structure, it’s important for us to note that we have doctors leading doctors, from the top down, within our organization. In some other organizations, there may be non-ODs who are in the leadership roles, that

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Several Optometry Career Paths Exist for Direct Care, Field Directors and Clinical Decision-Making

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shape what the doctors do in the clinics. We're not built that way," he said.

Rolling into this philosophy is the effort to work with doctors from a marketing standpoint and from a referral standpoint in a way that they are able to bring the types of patients they are really interested in seeing into those practices and then helping the patients better understand the opportunities available for care with MyEyeDr. This includes communication tools from email to more traditional advertising and marketing channels, as well as social media, radio and other media.

The Organizational Structure

In terms of the internal structure at MyEyeDr. there is a vice president of professional services and a director of clinical excellence.

The vice president of professional services—Scott Allison, OD—oversees day-to-day professional operations, and he has a team of regional clinical directors who oversee large areas of the clinics and clinical field directors, who report to them and who are much more locally focused.

The director of clinical excellence—Jeff Strand, OD, MBA—oversees various initiatives and operational areas. Within this framework and under clinical excellence, there are a number of doctors who look at new and emerging technologies, doctors who work to develop in-office efficiency with EHR platforms and operations, and doctors who assist and address peer review and overall instruction and education of the doctors within our organization, Dr. Beatty said.

"All of this funnels up through what we call clinical excellence," Dr. Beatty said. "Together that helps us really set direction and helps us think about things that may be immediately important, but also things that are on the horizon, things that we should be thinking about on a go-forward basis."

Within the organization there are doctors who are dedicated to training and onboarding, and they are the clinical managers. "They are even more lo-

cal than the clinical field directors and so they are really tasked with helping doctors understand how to operate day-to-day," Dr. Beatty said.

All of these professionals continue to practice in the clinics, and Dr. Beatty also sees patients periodically, as well as everybody on the ECP team who does.

He also noted that MyEyeDr. is a founding member of the American Optometric Association advocacy roundtable, which helps with providing an external and global view of areas that the AOA is thinking about. This roundtable group, which includes other larger players within the eyecare space, is an open



Dr. Artis Beatty (l) and Sue Downes.

forum for discussion and understanding of key issues, advocacy efforts and legislative matters, with a goal of helping to "really build the profession," he noted.

In addition, chief executive Sue Downes is deeply involved with The Vision Council, and is able to keep the senior leadership and medical team at MyEyeDr. informed about emerging issues. MyEyeDr. also is actively involved in state and local organizations and societies in eyecare, as well.

Working Through the Pandemic Pause

All of these things came together at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic when many eyecare offices were closed or operating at reduced hours and capacity. Dr. Beatty noted that it was key for MyEyeDr.

to emphasize how optometry comes under the umbrella of an essential health care service, which enabled the company to meet patient needs "in a new and more immediate way."

Optometry visits may have been considered essential on the patient side, whether for vision correction and/or treatment of ocular disease, but it was just as important for industry leaders to advocate and work to bring eyecare "to the forefront," he noted.

Dr. Beatty noted that the team "didn't change the goalpost due to COVID," but rather had the opportunity to accelerate implementation of technological developments already being considered.

He also noted that a mindset reset during the pandemic's height was necessary to create a good remote experience while meeting standards of care and patient experience. This "pause" allowed the group to bring all practices to a uniform EHR standard, think about synchronous and asynchronous visits, and how to best provide patients with remote care while meeting the expectations they were accustomed to in-office.

Over the past year, and in recognition of the 20th anniversary, Dr. Beatty said MyEyeDr. has spent some time looking at its goals and targets for the next 20 years. This includes considering how the company thinks about the ways in which eyecare may evolve going forward.

"And we really looked at doing things internally for our associates and our doctors," he added. "We grew our One Family Fund, which is a fund set aside to help MyEyeDr. associates and doctors in need. That came about as an organizational change at the end of 2020 and going into 2021 as part of the celebration."

He added, "We also focused on alignment and how do we make sure that everybody understands where we are, where we want to be and how we're going to get there. All of those things are part of having a birthday, reassessing where you are and looking at how you want to see the future." ■

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SPECIAL FEATURE

Addressing the Patient Experience, MyEyeDr. to Expand Video-Assisted Eye Health Exams

BY MARK TOSH / SENIOR EDITOR

Among the lessons learned by the executive team at MyEyeDr. over the past two decades is the importance of investing in areas that directly address the company's overall mission "to help patients live their best lives." This often has resulted in the decision to accelerate investment in integrated technologies that "transform and modernize the patient experience to where it needs to be," executives have noted.

Chief executive officer Sue Downes noted at a recent *Vision Monday* Executive Summit session that she believes the eyecare sector has "lagged" other business areas in the move to adopt the latest technologies and ideas, even as many new and great technologies are being developed. "Nothing is working together," she noted at VM's October 2020 virtual VM Leadership Summit, in a session titled "Stepping Up the Patient Experience."



MyEyeDr. is offering video-assisted eye health exams, where the patient benefits from the live on-screen doctor and the in-person technician for an enhanced personalized eye health exam experience. Here, Dr. April Madaris, on the screen, controls the entire exam remotely with on-site support from the trained technician in a location in Greensboro, N.C.

Addressing the eyecare sector's outlook and attitude toward innovations such as online refraction, she said, "We've moved from thinking that it will never happen in our lifetime; to being scared, to accepting. And now we're ready to embrace," noting that the industry is still challenged with "how it all integrates together" to truly serve up a more personalized, engaged experience for each patient and their preferences for care.

Noting the evolution of care and the patient experience, MyEyeDr.—like the Trailblazer path it has set out to follow in other areas—is readily adopting what it calls "video assisted eye exams."

In a recent interview with *Vision Monday*, Artis Beatty, OD, MyEyeDr.'s chief medical officer, noted that a number of the group's offices are offering the video-assisted eye health exams.

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MyEyeDr. Steps Up to Champion Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Efforts

Many of the leading companies in the eyecare sector have stepped up to champion Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) across their companies and the optical business overall, and MyEyeDr. stands out among this forward-thinking group. The company represents diversity across its leadership team, and strongly advocates community outreach as a priority among employees by encouraging staff members to volunteer in their communities to provide support to those in need.

MyEyeDr. also stepped up early on to be an initial supporter of Black EyeCare Perspective, an organization founded by optometrists Drs. Adam Ramsey and Darryl Glover.

Dr. Glover, a practicing OD within the MyEyeDr. organization, and Dr. Ramsey are working to “re-define the color of the eyecare industry “1 percent at a time by creating a pipeline for Black students into optometry.”

In addition, Black EyeCare Perspective was designed and created to cultivate and foster lifelong relationships between Black eyecare professionals and the eyecare industry, and to support the 13 percent promise, “an initiative to increase equity and representation of Black students in the eyecare industry to better mirror the 13 percent of Black people in the current U.S. population.”

“The culture at MyEyeDr. is definitely diversity,” Dr. Glover said in a recent interview with *Vision Monday*, noting that the company not only has a diverse leadership team but also “the diverse modes of practice that help our patients live their best lives.”

He added, “As a result of those two things, it has helped to elevate patient care for all the doctors within our organization. MyEyeDr. is really hands-on when it comes to supporting Black EyeCare Perspective, and we look forward to continue that partnership as time goes by.”

Dr. Glover joined MyEyeDr. in late 2014 when the practice he was part of—Raleigh, N.C.-based Eye Care Associates—was acquired by MyEyeDr. in one of the latter’s largest early optometry part-

nerships. Dr. Glover continues to see patients two to three days each week, and when he’s not in the exam lane, he’s involved with projects for the professional services team.

“I serve as our professional services special projects liaison, which means essentially that I handle all the cool projects, working with the marketing team, with the campus-based recruiting team and with Dr. Artis Beatty [chief medical officer] and Dr. Scott Allison [vice president, professional services] on whatever they need done.”

Drs. Ramsey and Glover co-founded Black EyeCare Perspective about three years ago, when he said the inspiration came about while attending an industry meeting and “walking around a conference with each other and not seeing ourselves, essentially. We knew at that point in time there was a problem, and we needed to fix it.” Glover said he believes he was “blessed to be able to see another Black doctor [Dr. Beatty, who was practicing with North Carolina’s Eye Care Associates at the time]” when just getting started in the eyecare business. “But to go to a conference and not see that, it was just like, ‘Wow, there needs to be some work here.’ That’s what sparked our conversation in the movement that we created.”

Glover said MyEyeDr. has “absolutely” been a strong supporter of the efforts of Black EyeCare Perspective. “MyEyeDr. helps out in tons of ways,” he said. One of the leading ways is via its support of Impact HBCU, an event (virtual in the past, but possibly in-person later this year) where Black EyeCare Perspective reaches out to all HBCU schools “to create awareness about how great optometry is and to bring out practicing optometrists so [these students] can see themselves. We talk about our stories, and then we partner with optometry schools to come out and talk about their stories and what it takes to get into optometry school.”

MyEyeDr. also opens the doors of its practices to prospective optometry students who want to come into the office and “shadow and experience” a practicing OD. “I’ve had numerous stu-



MyEyeDr.’s Darryl Glover, OD, takes part in a range of community events. Dr. Glover and Prattheeba, a first-year student at the Massachusetts College of Optometry, are pictured here on a typical work day in the office as part of the first cohort of students in Black EyeCare Perspective’s Pre Optometry Club. Prattheeba is now part of the transformational impact program.

dents come in and they have shadowed me,” he said. “MyEyeDr. just opens its doors for these students who have never had these opportunities to experience in an eyecare office,” he added, noting this is done across the entire MyEyeDr. organization.

In addition, Dr. Glover noted that MyEyeDr. gives him time to go into the community and perform screenings in underserved areas on behalf of both Black EyeCare Perspective and MyEyeDr.

“They have allocated time for me to do that, which is a big deal. Some organizations would say, ‘You need to get in that exam lane and see patients.’ But not the organization that I’m part of. MyEyeDr. really wants to make an impact in the community, and that’s why we’re known as trusted doctors of optometry in our communities as well.” ■

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New Talent Is Expanding the Senior MyEyeDr. Organization and Executive Team

Several new leaders with unique backgrounds and a range of skill sets and capabilities have become part of the MyEyeDr. executive team within the past year or two, joining longtime veteran leaders as the company further builds out its expansion and plans more strategic programs.

They join CEO Sue Downes and such long-term MED veterans as **Angela McCoy, now chief integrations and patient solutions officer, Dr. Artis Beatty, chief medical officer, Christina Perraud, VP planning and purchasing** and others to bring new expertise and long-range thinking.

Noha Abdalla joined MyEyeDr. as its new **chief marketing officer** in December 2020.

Abdalla came from Hilton where she served as the global vice president of digital and content marketing. She previously served as vice president, digital brand strategy and social media at Capital One, where she launched and grew Capital One's award-winning social media practice.

In 2015, Abdalla was named one of AdWeek's Top 50 Marketers, and throughout 2015, 2016 and 2017 her team won five Clio awards. At Capital One she also launched the digital and physical experience for CapitalOne 360, the retail bank's café model for direct banking.

She joined Capital One from Discovery Communications, where she led marketing for Animal



Planet, including the Surprisingly Human rebrand campaign in 2010. Abdalla also led national blood donor awareness campaigns for the American Red Cross and was a management consultant.

Tony Caskey joined MyEyeDr. last year as **executive vice president, field operations**. Caskey spent 25 years serving in many roles with CVS Health, starting as a staff pharmacist to pharmacy manager, Rx supervisor, district manager and regional manager before moving to the corporate office where he was senior director and then vice president in operations prior to transitioning to area vice president of Target Acquisition where he led Target pharmacy operations across 48 states, +1,672 stores, +\$4 billion in revenues and +12,000 colleagues. In 2018, Caskey transitioned to CVS Omnicare as vice president of account management. In 2020, he transitioned to serve as chief operating officer for Total Access Urgent Care.

Vanessa Bernarding is MED's new **executive vice president of human resources**, joining the senior leadership team in August of last year. Downes noted she will help broaden MED's human resources innovation and digitization efforts that will contribute to accelerating toward a "next generation as-

sociate experience."

She joined MED from Total Wine and More where she most recently served as the vice president of field human resources, HR operations and compliance where she led all talent acquisition, organizational development and training. Earlier in her career, she also served as senior manager of learning and development for AvalonBay Communities and was manager of enterprise learning and technology with Dick's Sporting Goods. In addition, she enjoyed a stint overseas with the Department of State as Administrative Officer for the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok.

Yogish Suvarna joined MyEyeDr. as its new **chief information officer** and will spearhead the technology efforts to elevate the patient experience, support clinical priorities and enhanced systems integrations. Suvarna comes from Aspen Dental Management Inc. where he served as chief information and digital officer. Aspen Dental (ADMI) supports more than 1,000 health and wellness offices across 45 states in three distinct categories of dental care, urgent care and medical aesthetics.

Suvarna has more than 20 years of experience in finance, retail, health care, and service sector IT, including roles with Bloomin' Brands, Winn Dixie Stores, Volvo Financial Services, GE, American Express and Dell. ■

MyEyeDr.—Leading at Scale to Elevate Both Eyecare and the Patient Experience

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"We've got new expertise at the top and throughout. We have professional service specialists, our clinical field directors, a subspecialty of doctors who are passionate about solutions for myopia management, treatment for dry eyes as well as advocate leaders who can support legislative change and help make a difference in the perceptions of the value of eye health.

"We're excited about the fact that we now have a whole team just involved in strategic initiatives exploration and thinking, examining technologies that have so much new potential.

Downes said, "We will continue to evolve in other areas so we will think about a green field strategy, where we can partner with great doctors and help set them up in their own locations, especially in markets where we are very mature and have a strong market presence. We'll also continue to invest in other companies outside of optometry offices, whether technical or health care driven. We're starting to invest in those companies and look at how they can evolve and bring us to a stronger health care position."

"I'm super-hyper-protective about making sure we do not become too top heavy as a team, and that we're building and managing our day to day chal-

lenges. COVID was hard, no matter how well you did or how many successes you had. We bought 250 offices during COVID and it has still been a challenge. We're living with inflationary pressures, and a range of new variables out there but we want to focus, too, on what we're expected to do every day."

Downes feels that by the end of 2022, MyEyeDr. could be at 950 or even potentially 1,000 locations. "We want to find the right partners but we also want to be sure our current family of 820 is protected and given the resources to do their work and deliver their services to patients. So, for me, personally, culture trumps growth for growth's sake." ■

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A Look at MyEyeDr. at 20 Years and Beyond

OCTOBER 2001: MyEyeDr. opened its first door in Burke, Va. on October 1, 2001 as the country and the region were reeling in the aftermath of September 11.

DECEMBER 2012: Boston-based Monitor Clipper makes a minority investment in MyEyeDr. to further grow the business. At the end of 2012, MyEyeDr. spanned 46 locations.

JANUARY 2014: MyEyeDr. acquires N.C.'s Doctor's Vision Centers.

OCTOBER 2014: Sue Downes, who had co-founded MyEyeDr. with Dr. Rob Samit in 2001, was named CEO of the company. At this time, MyEyeDr. had grown from its original group of offices in the Washington D.C. metro area to operate 110 practices in D.C., Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia.



DECEMBER 2014: MyEyeDr. acquires N.C.'s Eye Care Associates.

MAY 2015: MyEyeDr. enters the #10 spot on VM's *Top U.S. Optical Retailers Report*, measuring 2014 calendar sales with revenues of \$165 million from 139 locations.

AUGUST 2015: MyEyeDr. is recapitalized with Altas Partners and Canada's Caisse

de dépôt et placement du Québec fund, enhancing the organization's resources and escalating its expansion into new markets.



JUNE 2019: Goldman Sachs division to acquire Capital Vision Services, manager of MyEyeDr. Group, from Altas Partners and CDPQ West Street Capital Partners VII, a fund managed by the Merchant Banking Division of Goldman Sachs (GS MBD), Altas Partners and Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec (CDPQ) announced their entry into a definitive agreement under which GS MBD will acquire Capital Vision Services, LP (CVS) from Altas and CDPQ. Capital Vision Services provides management services to MyEyeDr. optometry practices. The deal is expected to be closed in the third quarter. Terms undisclosed, however, *The Wall Street Journal* valued the deal at \$2.7 billion, including debt.

MARCH 2020: MyEyeDr. was one of the country's first groups to shut down its offices due to the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. The company started to gradually reopen offices in August of that year. The MyEyeDr. team came together to establish the OneFamily Fund to assist its vulnerable associates who have

been impacted by the pandemic; the fund was financed exclusively by personal donations from members of the company's team.



JULY 2020: Black EyeCare Perspective launched IMPACT HBCU with a goal of bringing more awareness of the vision care field to Black students, educating students about the optometry profession through historically Black colleges and universities through the U.S. MyEyeDr. was one of the initial three supporters of the program, alongside America's Best and Warby Parker.



JANUARY 2021: MyEyeDr. expands the MyEyeDr. OneFamily Community Fund as a new charitable organization. This charitable 501(c)(3) organization is an expansion of the initial work done through the company's OneFamily Fund that was established in 2020 to help their associates through the economic challenges that year. The Fund's expanded

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Big Man, Big Eyewear and Eye Health Messages

ATLANTA—NBA basketball legend, sports analyst, businessman and philanthropist Shaquille O’Neal has been working on an eyewear partnership with Zyloware for several years. That effort also led to a collaboration for an exclusive S/O Shaquille O’Neal eyewear collection for MyEyeDr.

Last November, Shaq paid a visit to a MyEyeDr. here and experienced his first eye exam in many, many years. He met with MED’s Dr. Artis Beatty and others on the professional team for a comprehensive eye health exam and then chose a frame wardrobe for his new Rx pairs. During a video of the detailed exam, including retinal scans, O’Neal exclaimed “Eye exams have come a long way!”

MyEyeDr. posted about the visit on social media platforms saying, “We’re working with Shaq to get the word out that everyone deserves personalized vision health and wellness care, and frames as unique as they are. Have you gotten your exam lately?”

A spokesperson added, “MyEyeDr. has been working with Shaquille O’Neal not only on his exclusive line of frames, but also on ways to provide greater access to vision care and eyewear for youths in underserved communities.” More on the project will be revealed later this year, executives said. ■



Shaquille O’Neal Partners With MyEyeDr. on Exclusive S/O Shaquille O’Neal Eyewear Collection and eye health efforts to provide access to disadvantaged youth.



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A Look at MyEyeDr. at 20 Years and Beyond

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mission is to provide care, assistance, and support to associates and others in need by administering a financial hardship and disaster relief program, and to sponsor and support charitable work and outreach opportunities in the communities where MyEyeDr. and its affiliates' patients and associates live and work.



SEPTEMBER 2021: The American Optometric Association (AOA) and MyEyeDr. announce a partnership that will provide about 500 of the company's paraoptometric access to the association's exclusive educational and

professional development hub, EyeLearn. The hub includes hundreds of educational modules, webinars and articles to help advance clinical proficiency, the practice of contemporary optometry and practice management knowledge for AOA-member doctors of optometry, students of optometry and associate member paraoptometric staff. The access to best practices and on-demand resources for MyEyeDr.'s technicians was behind the formation of the partnership.



OCTOBER 2021: MyEyeDr. marked its 20th anniversary, launching a series of company

celebrations for its team of associates, doctors, managers, executives and operations center groups across the country and with patients. The company stood at 750 locations spanning 29 states.

AOA ADVOCACY ROUNDTABLE 2022

JANUARY 2022: The American Optometric Association announced that MyEyeDr. is one of several founding partners of a new forum the AOA is convening for policy discussion and research aimed at expanding the professional association's proactive advocacy on behalf of its member doctors and their patients. ■

Addressing the Patient Experience, MyEyeDr. to Expand Video-Assisted Eye Health Exams

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"I use that term because [the term] telehealth really does imply that you've got a patient who's remote and a caregiver who's also remote," he explained. He said the MyEyeDr. preferred approach is to work with patients who are physically in a MyEyeDr. location, with the doctor conducting the comprehensive eye health examination from a remote location using a video-assisted platform, which enables the patient and doctor to have a "synchronous visit."

"The doctor is even able to control the instrumentation and the office setting," he said. "They are able to do the refraction remotely and one of the technicians is with the patient from beginning to end. The doctor appears on the screen, allowing the patient and the doctor to have communication

and to complete the exam that way."

Beatty noted that "the big step" in this direction for MyEyeDr. came in 2020 when it first began piloting the video-assisted eye health exam procedure. "We grew that program considerably by the end of 2021, and we're going to continue to invest in that and grow it in 2022. It allows us to be able to bring eyecare to patients in locations where it may be difficult to hire a doctor or there may be more demand than a doctor by themselves can satisfy," he added. The video-assisted eye health exam may enable the doctor to meet the patient demand that otherwise would have gone without eyecare.

"This [model] can allow for more routine type of visits to be accomplished side by side with a doctor who's also doing a lot more medically directed care. And so it just opens up the ability to see

a variety of patients in clinics without necessarily having to limit the doctor on site based on who's walking in the door."

MyEyeDr. also is involved in remote eyecare in more of the traditional way that remote exams are thought of, and this is accomplished via the group's EHR platform, Beatty said. This remote model is called upon when a patient has questions about an eye issue and the patient is either still at home or in another remote location and can't get to the MyEyeDr. office. The doctor providing the care to the patient can either be in the office or in another remote location.

"Yes, we can do this via our EHR platform," he said. "So we're able to address video-assisted eye exams in these two ways." ■

—Mark Tosh