

PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

Make Classroom Visits to Generate Teacher Referrals

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It can be difficult to generate referrals from school districts. Every district struggles with budgets for children with special needs. Only a few districts consistently refer to a developmental/functional optometrist. Sometimes district referrals may present unique problems. One doctor who receives patient referrals from two districts says she often receives complex cases the district has not been able to help in any other way. This doctor finds these complicated cases can frustrate therapists and parents alike.

Here's an alternative path to educator referrals: Make classroom visits a routine part of patient care delivery. Within two weeks of any child starting optometric vision therapy, have a staff member visit that child's teacher. In other words, seek teacher referrals and forget about converting a district.

A competent therapist can be educated to call the teacher and arrange the visit. It helps if the parent is told this is part of patient care during intake. When an assistant tells the teacher that a parent requested the visit, it helps overcome reluctance. This should be stated on a parent information release form the teacher will see. Make sure to state that the purpose of the visit is to review doctor findings and

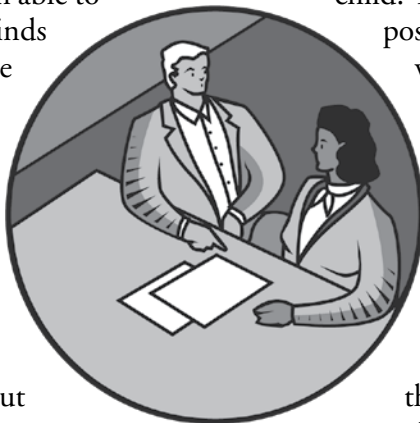
recommendations plus accommodations the child may require. Be sure to use the word accommodation since the district must make an effort to adjust for specific student needs if it can.

The visiting assistant should know typical visual hygiene and ergonomic recommendations in addition to any special accommodations for that particular child. Training on lighting, seating position, posture, furniture adjustments or a tilted working surface may be helpful.

It is probably a good idea to arrive early for the appointment since teacher schedules are tight. Begin the meeting with friendly introductions and then go through the child's report. Point out the link between his/her specific visual difficulties and the type of behavior the teacher observes. It is this problem/manifestation linkage that gets the teacher's attention. Take along a few appropriate visual demonstrations. If tracking is a problem, use an up-down reader to have the teacher experience the disruption for him/her self.

If the child is experiencing double vision or words that seem to swim, use a double vision demonstration to give the teacher a direct experience of what this is like. Say, "With those problems, its no wonder Johnny is having so much trouble with anything that involves reading." (The up-down reader and double vision demo are available free at <http://www.idealvt.com/downloads.htm>.)

Use the opportunity to explain that the child is just starting optometric vision therapy to resolve the problems. Mention that the child will be missing an hour or so of school each week. Find out which hours are the least problem for the teacher and consider adjusting the schedule. You are showing consideration and also telling teacher that academic performance is likely to improve and that optometric vision therapy deserves the credit.



Correspondence regarding this column can be emailed to idealvt@verizon.net or sent to Mr. Thomas Lecoq, 14420 Iroquois Rd., Apple Valley, CA 92307. All statements are the author's personal opinion and may not reflect the opinions of the College of Optometrists in Vision Development, Optometry & Vision Development or any institution or organization to which the author may be affiliated. Permission to use reprints of this article must be obtained from the editor. Copyright 2008 College of Optometrists in Vision Development. OVD is indexed in the Directory of Open Access Journals. Online access is available at <http://www.covd.org>. In the interest of full disclosure, Mr. Thomas Lecoq is a principle in the company, Lecoq Practice Development.

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Now ask the teacher whether she has other children like Johnny. Most teachers have several problem students each year. "Many of those children may have similar visual issues. Would you like to know how to identify them?"

Give the teacher a checklist (for example, the COVD Quality of Life checklist) and suggest they use it whenever they suspect a problem. Mention that the QOL form has a numeric score that has been normed. "If a child scores more than 25 points, vision is probably involved." WC Maples, O.D., FCOVD, has published several papers on the QOL survey.

Print the QOL list on one side of a sheet, the double image demo on the other. Give the teacher several loose copies plus a laminated one she can keep for future use. Teach how to ask the child whether, "especially when you're tired at the end of the day, do

you ever see something like the image on the double demo?" Put your name and phone number on the QOL as well as COVD's website.

Some O.D.s may want to give a list of area doctors who provide optometric vision therapy to whom the teacher can send parents, but that may be difficult or unnecessary if no one in your area is providing these services. In our experience, most teachers know exactly how to refer to a specific doctor without getting in trouble with the district.

End the meeting at the time you promised by asking whether the teacher would like to get more information from you. If yes, get an address (or an email address) then send information and invite them to a workshop at your office.

Will every teacher you visit refer? Unlikely, but if one in three do, it is worthwhile making the effort.



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The Tour de Optometry program is designed to increase awareness of behavioral and developmental vision and vision therapy in optometry school students. The Tour de Optometry Program was initiated in 2005, and the goal is to bring the private practice experience of developmental optometry to the optometric educational clinical setting.

Help us increase developmental optometry awareness and contribute to the COVD Public Awareness Campaign.

Donate to COVD with the Making Vision Therapy Visible contribution form online at [WWW.COVD.ORG](http://www.COVD.ORG).

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUED
SUPPORT OF THIS IMPORTANT CAMPAIGN
AND FOR HELPING SPREAD THE WORD!