

Using an International Medical Advisory Board to Guide Clinical Governance in a Corporate Refractive Surgery Model

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ABSTRACT

PURPOSE: To describe the role played by the International Medical Advisory Board (IMAB) in clinical and corporate governance at Optical Express, a corporate provider of refractive surgery.

METHODS: A review of goals, objectives, and actions of the IMAB.

RESULTS: The IMAB has contributed to study design, data analysis, and selection of instruments and procedures. Through interactions with Optical Express corporate and clinical staff, the IMAB has supported management's effort to craft a corporate culture focused on continuous improvement in the safety and visual outcomes of refractive surgery.

CONCLUSIONS: The IMAB has fashioned significant changes in corporate policies and procedures and has had an impact on corporate culture at Optical Express. [*J Refract Surg.* 2009;25:S647-S650.]
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To remain competitive, every medical enterprise must continuously ask itself: How can we deliver better patient care? An effectively run medical business will also ask itself: How do we organize ourselves to maximize efficiency and profitability without diminishing the quality of care?

All medical enterprises seek answers to these questions, and although it would be nice if the answers always came from within the practice or the corporation, every group recognizes the occasional need for outside assistance. Outsiders can bring a fresh perspective and a broad base of knowledge, and commonly it is their guidance that provides the solutions—or a way to find the solutions—that those within the company seek.

Like other similar enterprises, Optical Express has created an International Medical Advisory Board (IMAB) (Table 1). What distinguishes the Optical Express IMAB from most similar advisory groups is the role it plays within the Optical Express organization (Table 2). The IMAB's function is not to put a seal of approval on what others decide nor is it to simply offer suggestions on how to do things incrementally better. Rather, the IMAB is an integral part of determining the future of Optical Express. Not only does the IMAB participate in decision making, but it is intended to shape the process by which corporate decisions are made.

SETTING STANDARDS

For members of the IMAB, this is an extraordinary opportunity. Optical Express is possessed of resources—particularly data—that give it the ability to critically self-assess the

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TABLE 1

Optical Express International Medical Advisory Board (IMAB)

- Steven C. Schallhorn, MD, IMAB Chairman
- Jan Venter, MD, IMAB Clinical Director
- Mitchell C. Brown, OD, IMAB Deputy Medical Director
- Stephen C. Coleman, MD
- Joseph Colin, MD
- Steven J. Dell, MD
- Colman R. Kraff, MD
- Marguerite B. McDonald, MD
- Stephen Slade, MD
- John A. Vukich, MD

safety and efficacy of refractive surgery delivered in a corporate setting. The ultimate aim of the IMAB is to meld Optical Express’ rich data resources with the IMAB’s expertise in a process that continuously raises the quality of care for patients. The remainder of the article describes how the IMAB will contribute to this process.

First, what does the IMAB bring to the table that can help the company achieve its goals? The members of the IMAB are well known as teachers and innovators. By exposing Optical Express to thinking from outside the corporation, they serve as a source of fresh ideas. The IMAB members’ experience qualifies them to provide the guidance needed for Optical Express to adopt those practices that are likely to enhance visual outcomes and patient satisfaction.

DATA DRIVEN

As an enterprise, Optical Express places an emphasis on data: collecting data, analyzing data, and utilizing data. This supplement has a presentation with data from over 40,000 eyes. A database of that size is unprecedented in ophthalmology.

The value of such data is great, for it is the marriage of large quantities of reliable data with skilled analysis that drives sound medical decisions. To ensure data quality and sound study design, Optical Express maintains a corporate biostatistics department, a major function of which is to support the IMAB.¹

The combination of Optical Express’ data and a cadre of experienced scientists and clinicians who can work with it put Optical Express in a position to drive positive change in the refractive surgery industry.

Even with a large quantity of data and significant expertise, this endeavor will not be easy. I have a favorite

TABLE 2

Purpose and Role of the Optical Express International Medical Advisory Board (IMAB)

The IMAB offers

- A global view of trends
- Broad base of experience
- Diversity of views
- Proven track record of leadership

The IMAB’s role

- Introduce new techniques and technologies
- Help Optical Express utilize its wealth of data
- Provide continuing education within the organization
- Review and guide medical management decisions
 - Use evidence-based medicine to aid decision making
 - Continuous quality improvement
- Establish Optical Express leadership in creating a global standard of care
- Share Optical Express’ experience
- Publication of studies
 - Major presence at meetings around the world
- Improve the overall standard of care for all providers of refractive surgery
 - Benefit Optical Express patients and those of other providers
 - Enhance the reputation of the refractive surgery industry
 - Maintain public confidence in the safety and efficacy of refractive surgery
- Shape Optical Express corporate culture

saying that goes: “Most people do not recognize opportunity, because it comes dressed in jeans and looks like work.” And, in fact, collecting, collating, analyzing, and finding useful applications for this massive amount of data is an enormous task, so it’s fair to ask: What good can come from this effort?

Let us take an example. In this supplement, there are papers that use Optical Express data to analyze outcomes. Outcome measurements are a key element to driving success, and Optical Express’ data resources give it the ability to track results over very large numbers of patients and many physicians. From those results we can make decisions; we can establish practice guidelines. And we can use the same data facility to test those guidelines after implementation. Please note that although the data presented herein are limited to 1- to 3-months, patient follow-up is ongoing and longer-term data will be available.

ROLE OF THE IMAB

Clearly, the Optical Express store of data will be used internally to create better patient outcomes, but Optical Express also intends to share much of this data with the rest of the world to advance the field of refractive surgery.

First, the IMAB members will review and guide medical management decisions. Working with Optical Express biostatisticians, IMAB expertise can be used to structure studies to produce the most useful information. When studies are complete, the IMAB will assist in the analysis and application of their results to medical decisions. This evidence-based, decision-making process is a key aspect of the continuous quality improvement to which Optical Express is dedicated.

I would like to underscore that point. With its organization, expertise, access to data, and dedication to continuous improvement, Optical Express can set standards that others may look to for guidance. Indeed, that is a corporate goal, and an additional function of the IMAB is to make Optical Express an active institutional presence in the global refractive surgery community. We can do this by writing and publishing papers and posters, speaking at meetings (including those held electronically), and entering into dialogue with colleagues around the world. While the future is always uncertain, I believe that, if Optical Express lives up to its promise, if it continues to study issues and make evidence-based decisions in a credible, transparent manner, it can be a force in guiding decision-making around the world.

A secondary benefit is that through careful analysis and public reporting of outcomes, the IMAB can help maintain public confidence in the safety and efficacy of refractive surgery—not just of refractive surgery at Optical Express but of refractive surgery in general. The simple fact is that all of us in the field rise or sink based on the public perception of what we do. If patients believe in refractive surgery, there is a place for all of us. If they don't believe, neither Optical Express nor anyone else in the field will succeed.

A STRONG PRESENCE

The IMAB aims to help establish Optical Express as an institution dedicated to teaching others the art and science of refractive surgery. This process has begun with invitational symposia (such as the one for which this paper is written) where information is shared within the company to raise our own standards.

Moving outside the corporation, IMAB members will participate in national and international programs. The IMAB gives Optical Express the ability to offer a continuing stream of lectures and courses at meetings around the world.

The IMAB can lead in taking the Optical Express story to our colleagues globally. We can publish in professional journals. We can establish ongoing relationships with the media to explain and reinforce what we do. We can interact with Optical Express personnel to develop articles and symposium presentations at congresses.

It is a stated goal of the IMAB to establish a regular flow of information to ensure that the world is aware of Optical Express and its commitment, experience, and professional standing. Indeed, although relatively new to the field of refractive surgery, Optical Express is transforming itself from a consumer of medical education that in the past has learned and applied what others have taught to an active contributor to the knowledge base of peer-reviewed information in refractive surgery. It is becoming a net exporter of experience and expertise. This is a fundamental milestone in corporate development and a sign of the company's determination to hold a leadership position within the industry.

BUILDING THE BUSINESS OF REFRACTIVE SURGERY

How does this impact Optical Express' business? Where is the return on the investment made in the IMAB? For one thing, the IMAB can direct the use of Optical Express data in ways that are useful to the company. For example, Optical Express can not deliver what patients want if we do not know what that is. We need our patients to tell us how we are doing, but we can't just talk about patient satisfaction—we need to measure it. There are standardized metrics for evaluating patient satisfaction, and the IMAB can ensure that these additional data are gathered and used.

The patient satisfaction data presented by Brown et al² establish that Optical Express is already doing a good job of giving patients what they want. But patient satisfaction data can do more than simply tell us how we are doing. Increasingly, patient satisfaction is being taken into account by insurance and governmental organizations seeking criteria by which to evaluate providers.

For example, in the United States, the Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (CAHPS) program is a public-private initiative to develop standardized surveys of patients' experiences with ambulatory and facility-level care. The majority of large US clinics report their results to this database. By using the same standardized metrics, Optical Express can measure itself against the other providers in the database, allowing the company to see how it compares to prestigious clinics in the United States and elsewhere. These are the exciting things we can do with Optical Express data, and ideas such as this

are the kinds of opportunities that the IMAB brings to Optical Express.

THE FUTURE

Going forward, the IMAB will help Optical Express continue to develop a holistic approach to refractive surgery. We know that the technology is not the only key driver for patient outcomes and satisfaction. Outcomes are influenced by such things as dry eye management, and patient satisfaction is heavily influenced by the individual's experience before, during, and after the procedure. The role of the IMAB is to help Optical Express stay focused on all of these areas.

But the role of the IMAB goes beyond advice and education. It includes the development of a corporate culture. Our role is to ensure that Optical Express not only does things well today, but that in all its operations, the company continuously lays the groundwork to do them better tomorrow.

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