

Activa for meibomian gland dysfunction and the IRDA dry eye diagnostic tool from SBM Sistemi.

Making dry eye work

FOR YOUR PRACTICE



Sydney optometrist Harry Notaras has continually sought new technology to expand the scope of his practice. Dry eye is an area that's delivered particular success for his patients, largely due to a willingness to invest in the latest instrumentation.

Mr Harry Notaras and Dianne Pylotis, principal optometrists of Eyewear Youwear, a practice located in the upmarket Sydney suburb of Surry Hills, embodies the philosophy that differentiation and an ability to commercialise special interests will ultimately lead to the prosperity of independent optometry.

A keen investor in new technology, Notaras established his practice in 1995 and has continually sought ways to make his service stand-out to a demographic largely comprised of office-based professionals in industries such as architecture, law, art and design.

Dry eye disease was an unknown phenomenon when Eyewear Youwear commenced operations 27 years ago, but as research in the field evolved, so did the practice's interest in expanding its scope to accommodate its patient base.

"As dry eye became more researched, and studies such as DEWS (Tear Film & Ocular Surface Society's Dry Eye Workshop) came out, that piqued our interest, because we had patients always complaining about vision problems saying they could see clearly one moment and blurry the next, and they have to keep blinking to correct it," Notaras explains.

"As the research developed and told us more about how important treating dry eye is for visual function, it got us more interested. And as the early instruments emerged, we embraced them and now there's a huge amount of opportunity for manufacturers to diagnose and treat dry eye."

Indeed, Eyewear Youwear began evolving its dry eye suite. Over the years it added an intense pulsed light (IPL) machine from Lumenis, an eyelid warming goggle device incorporating heating capability for meibomian gland dysfunction (MGD) called Blephasteam, and meibography imaging on its slit lamp. Pylotis, the practice's therapeutically-endorsed optometrist, can also prescribe prescription eye drops like ciclosporin and lifitegrast, often working in tandem with Notaras during the dry eye patient journey.

More recently, through BOC Ophthalmic Instruments, Eyewear Youwear sought to elevate its dry eye diagnostic and treatment offering, acquiring instruments produced by SBM Sistemi, a firm in northwest Italy punching above its weight in terms of ophthalmic innovation.

This has come in the form of IDRA, a diagnostic device launched in 2019 that is SBM's most advanced ocular surface analyser. And earlier this year, the practice introduced Activa, SBM's first treatment instrument for MGD, featuring an eye mask with heating and massaging technology.

The devices have been welcome additions for Notaras' practice whose dry eye patients usually fall into two groups. Those with easier-to-manage dry eye caused by environmental factors, and those with anatomical problems such as rosacea, blepharitis and MGD, among other conditions.

"When it comes to dry eye, we see a big mixture of people. We tend to assess everybody that comes through the door, because even though most people will not tell you they have dry eye, particularly contact lens wearers, it's one of those things that creeps up and they just think it's normal until you show them otherwise," he says.

Since acquiring the SBM instruments, Notaras has been impressed with the broad functionality of the IDRA device that has a small footprint and mounts to his existing slit lamp.

"It's ideal for a practice of my size based in Surry Hills. It provides information for many aspects like tear meniscus height, non-invasive tear breakup time, auto 3D meibography," he explains, noting additional functions such as auto interferometry test, blepharitis examination, break-up time staining test, white-to-white measurement and pupillometry.

"It also has blink rate detection, which can be recorded to assess whether patients are blinking correctly. IDRA has allowed us to go much more in-depth with one instrument, instead of switching from one to another."

In Notaras' practice, Activa acts more as a second-line therapy, with IPL the



Harry Notaras, Eyewear Youwear.

last line. While it might not be as comfortable for patients as expected, Notaras has been impressed with the results in his practice.

“This is one of the few instruments I’m aware of that does both – massage and heating. The other I’m aware of can be more invasive and very expensive for a consultation, whereas this is a far less expensive treatment option,” he says.

“The Activa is a goggle-like device, but it’s more rigid, and you’ve got to be a bit more careful with how you use it on the patient and manage their

expectations around comfort. The idea is that the vibration massages the meibomian glands, and as time goes on, that vibration increases. We’ve only been using it a matter of months, but have found that we’re able to express glands that we couldn’t before. Over time, some patients are getting to a stage where the meibum oil is becoming more like olive oil rather than toothpaste.”

Notaras says the therapy has also been effective on styes.

FITTING DRY EYE INTO THE PRACTICE WORKFLOW

In terms of scheduling dry eye services, Notaras says if patients are suspected of it, they are recommended to attend a follow up appointment where a full work-up is completed.

Pricing for this appointment needs to be tailored for the individual practices to suit their patient demographic, however he has heard that charges for this can exceed \$100 per consultation. In regard to Medicare rebates, Notaras suggested contacting Optometry Australia for advice.

“Based on what we find, we offer a package that highlights the importance of multiple treatments with the Activa. And depending on their condition, it could vary from four to six – and then topping that up every couple of months,” he explains.

“The IPL is our last weapon of choice in some patients where we feel it may be beneficial. These patients could be suffering with such issues as MGD, orbital rosacea, demodex infestation and recurring styes. If IPL alone is not achieving desired results we would combine the other treatments using the massager and the steaming instruments as well, which allows us to express their glands that much better.”

A strong proponent of independent optometry, Notaras says its areas like dry eye where practices like his can differentiate and ensure the viability of their business. While the investment is one that needs to be considered carefully, it becomes a no-brainer with a longer term view.

“Dry eye, in particular, allows you to broaden the scope of your practice and reduce the monotony of performing refractions all day long. With dry eye, it made my day more interesting. I have more involvement with the patient and these patients are very appreciative of the extra time and effort you give them,” he says.

“In my experience this enhances patient loyalty. You are going to have an initial outlay, but it starts the process of you identifying those patients. They’ve come in, they want their treatment, they also require their routine refractions. You will see these patients more often and the result is a happy loyal patient which overall will expand your practice.”

He continues: “I’ve never had a problem with buying instrumentation and technology. Our practice is highly motivated by this. And we’ve found that has bolstered our practice in all areas. You’ve got to be able to pay the instrument back over time, but it makes you work that little bit harder to make

sure that you are not letting patients go with dry eye that end up somewhere else having their problem seen to.”

If practices haven’t incorporated some level of dry eye management, Notaras says it is a good time to start. There is an abundance of technology and therapies, and while they might require an initial investment, there’s plenty of support to upskill in this area.

“If you want to stand out, I think it’s time to adopt these types of services. There are courses and CPD articles and events offered all the time on dry eye and does not require a huge investment of your time.”

PARTNERING WITH A DRY EYE INNOVATOR

While BOC Instrument’s relationship with SBM is one of its newest, dating back to 2017, the company now offers a suite of seven instruments from the manufacturer. SBM itself only entered the dry eye sphere in 2015.

The entrepreneurial spirit of SBM was the catalyst for BOC managing director Mr Tony Cosentino opting to sign a distribution agreement for Australia.

In addition to marquee products like the IRDA and Activa, the company’s latest releases include two new imaging modules: the DSLC200 which adds digital capabilities to slit lamps; and the Dry Eye Module (DEM 100), a software interface that attaches to the slit lamp and DSLC200 and offers a comprehensive set of dry eye diagnostics.

Soon, BOC hopes to begin importing SBM’s new topographer called the OS 1000, described as a dedicated dry eye platform with topography, featuring film analysis and 3D meibography. For this device, SBM still needs to obtain registration certifications for Australia, which it hopes to achieve in early 2023.

“They are a company that innovates by research – not by copying other technology that is out there – that’s why we have introduced them into the portfolio,” Mr Tony Cosentino, managing director BOC Instruments says. ■

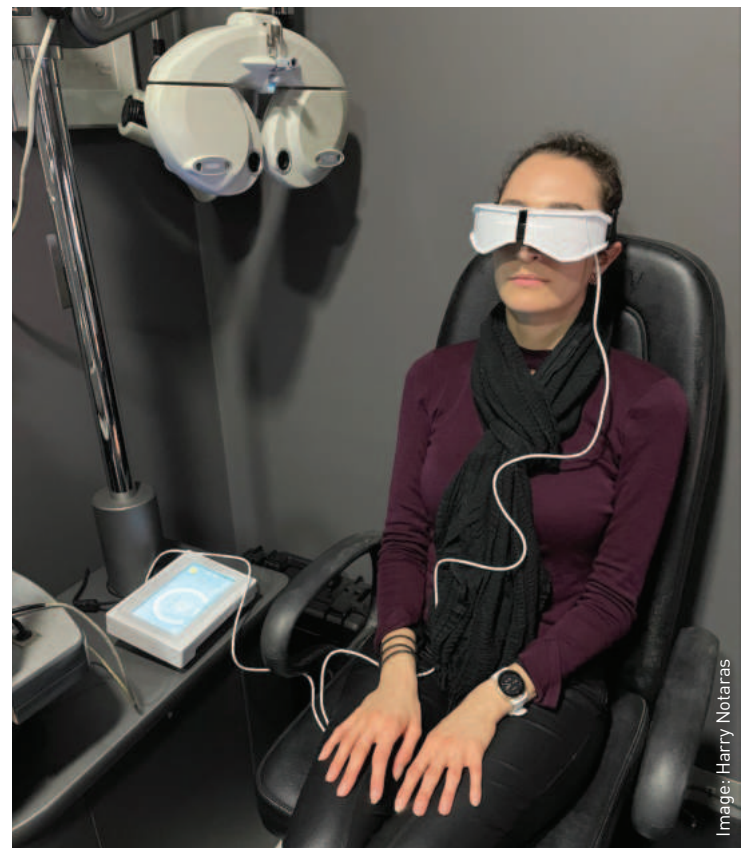


Image: Harry Notaras

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