



Vision Source® TRUSTED COLLEAGUE

Gil Davis, OD

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Strength and Opportunity in Numbers

Right now, practice partners **Gil Davis, OD, Kent Stribling, OD, Jacob Ivey, OD, and Emily Nail, OD**, have seven practice locations. In the past half year or so, they could have grown it even more – but even with four partners and two associate doctors – David Otto, OD, and Audrey Otto, OD – they don't have the capacity to provide the clinical services in more locations. Dr. Davis says that in Mississippi, as in much of rural America, today's young graduates don't want to come to a town with a population of 10,000 people and take on the debt of buying an existing practice.

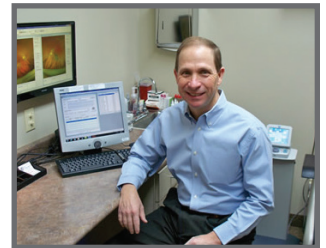
That means that doctors with existing practices have no buyers. That's how Dr. Davis and Dr. Stribling got started. "We started working together in 1998, and we began bringing in other doctors and acquiring other practices," Dr. Stribling says.

The largest community in which one of their practices is located is Meridian, with a population of 50,000. "It's the center of the hub," says Dr. Davis. The Newton practice, where he spends most of his time, has 4,000 residents, while nearby towns of Louisville and Philadelphia have about 9,000 and 12,000 residents, respectively. The result is that these practice partners dominate a huge area geographically. "When doctors here want to retire, they call us."

It bothered them, he says, that they just didn't have the bandwidth to take on more practices because the doctors all know how much the services are needed. "We've been doing the medical model forever. Most rural practitioners have. Around here, if you want to see an ophthalmologist, you're going to have to drive 60 miles," Dr. Davis says. Seeing patients with diabetes, obesity and glaucoma are routine occurrences. "We're seeing it all, every day. In one recent morning, I had four glaucoma patients, three macular degeneration patients and two patients with diabetic retinopathy. That's just a normal day."

To manage a patient caseload like this requires investment into the practices. The group has five OCTs, one in each of their larger practice locations and one in a medium-sized practice. "Our affiliation with Vision Source® has helped us create a model for consistent patient care and service throughout all locations," says Dr. Ivey. There are three Optos units and the TRS-5100 from Marco in the larger locations, as well as digital fundus cameras and Humphrey visual field units everywhere. When patients need VEP or other specialized testing, at least they don't have to drive as far. A retinal specialist and a cataract surgeon travel to two of the locations, also.

Because the growth has been fast and somewhat unexpected, Dr. Davis and Dr. Stribling recognize that they need to create a more defined organizational structure. Dr. Nail and Dr. Ivey are partners in some of the locations, but the senior partners see that it would be more attractive for younger ODs to buy into a piece of a larger pie. They're already taking some steps. For example, this past year, they hired an overall optical manager to coordinate the dispensaries and make sure that the practices are maximizing savings opportunities and profit. All the locations are enrolled in The Optical DreamSM Powered by Vision Source® program. "With more than 40 employees, we also need a HR manager. Up until now, we've been doing that all ourselves," says Dr. Nail.



Kent Stribling, OD



Gil Davis, OD



Jacob Ivey, OD



Emily Nail, OD

(Over, please)



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When Dr. Davis and Dr. Stribling first joined Vision Source® in 2001, they immediately realized the value of the collegial relationship with other ODs. “Even though the pricing was obviously an attractive part, it was the networking that really helped us and still does. Some of us go to The Exchange® every year because the knowledge you gain there is incredible. Vision Source® has been so focused on being on the cutting edge of practice technology, we feel like we’ve had an advantage over other practices in the region,” he says. The practice locations all use visionsourcelearning.com for staff training, too.

While the doctors say they still have more to learn, especially as they figure out how to gain maximum efficiency and take up other opportunities as their local colleagues offer to sell their practices, they’ve also seen the shift in their own roles as part of the Vision Source® network. Now, they’re often the ones who are answering questions from other Vision Source® members who want to expand a rural network of practices. “Doctors aren’t going to come to these towns – unless they’re from here – and add another \$300,000 or more to their debt. It’s our philosophy that by reinvesting in our patients, our staff and our practices, we can create opportunities for everyone.

That’s where she picks up strategies about lab arrangements or products that could benefit in her office. For example, she added the TRS 5100 autorefraction system from Marco to her new, second exam lane. Between that and the three team members that she has added since opening, she is so much more efficient, she says. “I’ve been able to delegate a lot of duties to my technician, so that allows me to enjoy the fun part of the job—talking with patients—while still being able to increase the number of patients I see each day,” she says.

“We’ve been very busy, and we continue to increase our patient volume and awareness of the practice,” she says. It’s nearly time to add an additional team member, too. While the look of the practice has undergone an evolution, the focus on customer service has not changed. “Our original concept was that I wanted to keep a lower volume, with higher revenue per patient. That would also allow me to take on more challenging cases. The concept has been very successful,” she says. Yet she’s been able to build the medical practice, as well.

New or annual exam patients are led into the exam lane with the Marco TRS system, where she performs the autorefractions herself. “Every day, every exam, I hear comments on that. Patients will say how much easier it is,” she says. Contact lens checks or medical patients can be brought into the older exam lane, or if there’s a backlog, someone can wait in that room, freeing up the pretesting room. “We have so much more flexibility, and we’re keeping the patient flow going more smoothly,” she says.

And patients in the dispensary are enjoying perusing the designer and higher-end frame lines, such as Barton Perreira, Lindberg, Chanel, Tory Burch, Gucci, Face a Face and Tom Ford, among others. They’re having fun in there ... just as Dr. Mumford envisioned they would.