

FROM RECEPTIONIST TO DISPENSER PRACTICE OWNER



DISPENSER DETAILS

Name: Allyson Caffell
Position: Owner & optical dispenser
Location: Northam Optical, Western Australia
Years in industry: 26

1. What attracted you to a career in optical dispensing?

At 17 years old, I fell into the optical industry first as a receptionist. Living in Perth, a friend called to say a new independent optical business had opened in my hometown, Northam, and they were looking for a receptionist. I applied and got the job. After working as a receptionist for seven years, I ventured into an optical chain in Mandurah as a manager. I loved the challenge of meeting budgets, managing staff and the contact I had with so many likeminded people. I then moved back to Northam where I was fortunate that an independent optometry practice supported me to study for my Cert IV in Optical Dispensing. By 2012 I had completed the course with distinction and, armed with 15 years' experience, I opened my own practice, Northam Optical, and haven't looked back.

2. What are your main career highlights?

I've just celebrated 10 years in business. There have been many highlights, including attending Silmo, O=MEGA, O-SHOW and TLC Tasmania. I have also made many lifelong friends but my main highlight would be opening my own store. I couldn't have achieved it without the support of my husband Clint, daughters, Kate, Amitty and Piper, and parents, Jan and Alan. I also have a brilliant team: Marz, Graham, Leanne and Michelle – our cohesion has made Northam Optical what it is today. Plus, I will be joining ODA's aid trip to Fiji this year, volunteering with a group of optical dispensers in remote villages to access better eyecare and vision.

3. What are your strengths as an optical dispenser and what excites you?

I love when a person comes to me with a problem they couldn't have resolved anywhere else. Whether it is a change of lens design, or working with my optometrist to find a solution, I pride myself on thinking outside of the square and troubleshooting with an open mind. Dispensing unique lenses to suit specific requirements gives me a real buzz.

4. If you could provide advice to yourself at the beginning of your career, what would you say?

Enjoy what you do. When you enjoy your career, going

to work every day is not a chore. Although I fell into optometry, I would not change my career for the world. I love interacting with clients, working alongside my peers and working for myself. I feel lucky to be doing what I do.

5. What are the key opportunities and challenges facing the future of optical dispensing in Australia?

As an independent practice, competing with multinational companies is my biggest challenge. They have such a big presence and huge buying power over independents. The way I have combatted this is by dealing with independent companies, such as Opticare, Mondottica and Eyes Right Optical. These companies face the same issues I do and the support I receive back speaks volumes. I would recommend joining Optipro, who negotiate discounts for members on frames and lenses.

6. How do you ensure your skills and knowledge stay up to date in a fast-moving industry?

Staying up-to-date in the optical world is a must. I was out of optometry for less than a year and felt I had been away for 10. I love to attend optical conferences where possible, including, Silmo, O=MEGA, O-SHOW, TLC Tasmania and WAVE. I'm excited for WAVE this

year, as they have a dispensing stream that I'll be attending. ODA conducted a masterclass in Western Australia that I found extremely motivating. After a few years, you can become complacent, so I love attending all of these to not only stay motivated but in touch with new technology and improvements.

7. Why did you become an ODA member, and what value do you see in the organisation?

I'm proud to be an ODA member. An organisation like this for optical dispensers has been a long time coming. Optometrists must attain a certain amount of CPD to maintain their qualification but dispensers don't even need a qualification anymore. Having ODA is going to boost the careers and skillsets of optical dispensers. Now ACOD is offering Cert IV in Optical Dispensing across most capital cities, the public will be the ones who benefit from more knowledgeable, higher skilled professionals.

8. What would you say to others thinking of joining ODA?

New or not to the industry, everyone can gain something from joining. Whether it's networking, continual development, or industry changes, this is where to find it all. Have a look around the website, you will be amazed what they offer. ■



Allyson Caffell prides herself on troubleshooting with an open mind when patients come to her with an unresolved issue. Images: Allyson Caffell.