



# Seven Ways To Nurture Your Practice During COVID-19 Down Time

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March 19, 2020

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In the last 48 hours, we've seen the number of COVID-19 cases in the United States nearly double, and that rate is only anticipated to increase. Local health systems in the hardest hit areas are already at or nearing maximum bed and ICU capacity. Among the numerous initiatives being enacted in an effort to curb the spread or to at least 'flatten the curve' with regard to the pace of spread, the CDC has recommended the suspension of all preventative, routine eye care.

A few days ago, I suggested a few ways to respond to COVID-19 in your open and running practice. For many, staying open is no longer a reality. Others are keeping their practices open but with a smaller staff size, reduced hours or other restrictions. If you have been forced to close your practice, foresee a closure, or are thinking of implementing other changes, here are seven ways you can maximize the down time to nurture your practice.

## 1 Continue To See Urgent Care Cases

Just because life has been upended, it doesn't mean your patients will no longer have vision threatening conditions, develop PVDs, catch conjunctivitis (be careful of COVID-19 associated conjunctivitis), or get a corneal abrasion from catching up on the house projects they've been putting off. The CDC recommendation does not prevent you from seeing those patients. Maintain the highest level of sanitation, keep the number of individuals in the office under 10, and do everything you can to prevent the spread of the disease.

## 2 Leverage Telehealth

As I highlighted in my last article, Healthy Eyes Advantage (HEA) recently launched an exclusive program with **EyecareLive** for our members. Since that article, the federal government has broadened Medicare coverage and temporarily relaxed HIPAA requirements to make telehealth adoption easier. Our patients still need our care, especially the elderly with dry eye, glaucoma, and macular degeneration. Leveraging telehealth will allow you to continue caring for them, provide you an additional revenue stream during this time, and showcase to your patients that your practice is on the cutting edge of patient care. To take advantage, contact EyecareLive at [sales@eyecarelive.com](mailto:sales@eyecarelive.com) or 415.890.3937 and be sure to mention that you are an HEA member.

## 3 Engage Your Contact Lens Patients

We educate our patients every day on not abusing or over wearing their contact lenses. Don't let this time be an exception. Continue to emphasize proper contact lens care and leverage your practice management system to highlight which patients are likely to be in need of a contact lens resupply. Reach out to them as a reminder. Many of the major contact lens distributors like **ABB Optical** and **Nassau OOGP** provide ways for your patients to purchase their lenses online and ship directly to their house.

## 4 Demonstrate Your Leadership Role In Healthcare

The role of any healthcare provider is to care for and educate their patients. This is a trying time for many, and there is an abundance of poor information your patients will consume. Educate yourself on the risks to individuals and the healthcare system as a whole, and provide your patients with the resources they need to respond appropriately to this crisis. It will create another level of stickiness as they'll see you beyond 'just their eye doctor.'

## 5 Invest Your Time In Expanding Your Knowledge And Services

Time is truly our only finite, investable resource. Invest your time in expanding your knowledge. HEA partners with two online CE platforms, **Quantum Optical** ([www.quantumoptical.com](http://www.quantumoptical.com) — more ABO/NCLE education than COPE) and **Marshall B. Ketchum University** ([https://apps.ketchum.edu/ceonline/scco\\_ce.asp](https://apps.ketchum.edu/ceonline/scco_ce.asp)). HEA members have access to CE at a discounted rate, and most states allow at least a few hours of online education. In addition, ARBO recently relaxed the rules for canceled, live events that move to an online platform. If a live event offering CE has canceled due to COVID-19 and they still provide education online, it can still be counted as Live CE.

Invest your time in expanding your services. Have you wanted to expand your services but felt you'll never have the time? Let's face it, we do now. Have you wanted to begin offering myopia management, enhance your ocular disease services, or increase specialty contact lenses? Do you want to expand into cognitive screening? HEA has a host of resources available to members to help you expand these services, including a brand new, exclusive program with **Cognivue**.

## 6 Revisit Your Business Plan And Your Annual Goals

For many, re-reading your business plan can rekindle the fire of when you started and show you just how far you've come. Does your business plan need to be updated? Are there any goals you can cross off already? Do you need to formally establish processes and procedures to make your flow more efficient? Do you need to evaluate launching a formal marketing campaign or patient experience program? There is a plethora of online resources that can help you break these lofty goals into bite-size, SMART steps.

## 7 Show Your Team You Care

For many, closing or modifying your practice means an inability to pay your team members. This will inevitably cause significant hardship on them. Show empathy, show encouragement, and do what you can to support them. I'm a firm believer that strong practices are only strong because of their teams, and studies show that when leaders sacrifice for their team, their team will be more likely to sacrifice because they know their leader cares for them. Many states have expanded emergency unemployment benefits during this pandemic. Make sure your team knows what resources they have available to them.

COVID-19 and social distancing have affected us all and will continue to do so until we as a nation can beat it. Now is not the time to give up. We will overcome and build stronger practices because of it. HEA is here for you. We're all in this together.

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