



# Vision Source<sup>®</sup> TRUSTED COLLEAGUE

## Dennis Bales, OD

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### Create a Practice That Serves Your Community

When Dennis Bales, OD, recently ran into an optometry school classmate, he was surprised to see how different their practices were. The friend has a practice near a college campus in a high-tech area, and the bulk of his business is refractive care. Dr. Bales' practice, Santa Ynez Valley Optometry Services, on the other hand, is about 35 miles away from two larger communities—where he finds himself a primary eye care provider for the entire region. Because of that, he has kept up with technology upgrades to be able to provide a full range of services.

There is an ophthalmologist to whom he refers patients, but the convenience to patients, as well as the relative speed in which they can be scheduled in his office, are major advantages to them. "My equipment has saved me many times," he says, referring to his optical coherence tomography unit, visual field, and Optos Daytona unit. But that doesn't mean his practice is entirely medically focused, however. His contact lens representatives tell him that he does a higher volume of contact lenses, especially daily disposable lenses, than others in the region. "I use the same philosophy. It's important to keep up through CE and Vision Source<sup>®</sup> meetings to know what's new, so that I have the greatest range of skills and products for the most people," he says. He stops short of calling himself a contact specialist in all designs, but between the soft and hybrid contact lenses he does fit, he feels he can accommodate most people. "When I can't be the problem solver for a patient, I recognize that and send him or her to the right place."

When Dr. Bales took over the practice in 1988, he faced the same kind of challenges that any new owner does—showing respect for the doctor who built the practice and also working to modernize it. He moved slowly, but over time, the changes have been significant. The office had 500 square feet of space and one exam lane. Dr. Bales worked part-time in an HMO while he was building the patient base up to a level that could support him. Now, he has a 1,500-square-foot facility to which he moved in 2000, with three exam rooms and a special testing room. The five or so years during which he worked for a local HMO helped him establish collegial referral relationships with a number of primary care physicians and the ophthalmologist.

Now Dr. Bales is beginning to look toward the next phase of his career. "I have a physician coming in one day a month for consultations with cataract and surgery patients, and I'll be working with Williams Group on an eventual transition plan. He's also considering bringing on an associate who has the certification to manage glaucoma patients, as many younger California ODs do now upon graduation. He recently discovered the joy of volunteering on an overseas missions trip—something he's interested in exploring more. "In the meanwhile, I'll continue to work at keeping this practice going strong and being viable."

### The Vision Source<sup>®</sup> Advantage

Dr. Bales says that his membership in the Vision Source<sup>®</sup> network has helped him tremendously. "When I joined about 10 years ago, it propelled me and the practice. I also reached out to Williams Group, and the local California economy began improving around the same time. I don't think I've had a down year since I joined Vision Source<sup>®</sup>," he says.

He takes advantage of all the meetings he can possibly attend. He missed The Exchange in Boston because he was on a mission trip in Nicaragua at the time, but looks forward to connecting with his Vision Source<sup>®</sup> colleagues at the American Optometric Association meeting. "It's very important to open yourself up to new ideas. Plus, it keeps the practice of optometry more interesting," he says.



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