

# PIVOTING TO A DISPENSING CAREER PAYS DIVIDENDS



## DISPENSER DETAILS

**Name:** Chris Cunningham  
**Position:** Senior optical dispenser  
**Location:** Eyedentity, Carnegie & Elsternwick, Victoria  
**Years in industry:** 8

### 1. What initially attracted you to a career in optical dispensing, and how did you enter the profession?

My career in optical dispensing started as a happy coincidence. Having left a busy job following a change of company ownership, I found myself longing for a change, but feeling limited as my skills and experience were exclusively in retail. One afternoon I was at a café, thumbing through the local paper when I saw an advertisement for a sales assistant. I thought I'd enquire and was surprised to learn it was with an optometrist. I'd worn glasses since I was a toddler, so I thought "why not?". The optometrist saw value in my business management skills and customer service experience and took me on as a trainee.

### 2. What are your main career highlights?

Joining the team at Eyedentity was a career highlight. Eyedentity value you for who you are and invest in you both personally and professionally. They encouraged me to undertake the Australasian College of Optical Dispensing (ACOD) Cert IV in Optical Dispensing, even though I hadn't sat an exam in 40 years. Graduating is a highlight and something I never thought possible. Prior to starting my dispensing career, I worked my way up to an area manager for a retail chain.

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

An optical dispenser is so much more than the person handing out glasses. I help people express their personality through frame selection, sometimes challenging their perceptions of what glasses need to be. How their glasses make them feel is just as important as improving their vision. I particularly get excited about helping children, and reassuring their parents. I recently had father come in with his six-month-old baby, devastated that she had to wear glasses. Initially I reassured him, but when it came to fitting the glasses, he became distressed at his baby's cries. Then she opened her eyes and fell silent, with a huge smile as she saw her world in a new way. Dad was smiling too.

### 4. If you could give some advice to yourself at the beginning of your optical dispensing career, what would you say?

Be kind to yourself. There is so much to learn, and you don't need to know it all on day one. It's OK to ask questions and allow the team to support you.

### 5. What do you see as the key opportunities and challenges facing the future of optical dispensing in Australia?

Unlike optometrists, optical dispensers do not need to be registered or qualified, leading to inconsistent practices and people dispensing lenses with inadequate training and support. Ultimately this impacts patient outcomes and reflects poorly on the industry. Professional associations such as ODA have a huge role to play, both in uplifting the skills of current optical dispensers and in promoting it as a career.

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

It's important to keep in contact with your sales reps to be aware of new products, when they will be released and the training available to ensure you remain at the top of your game. Sales reps can also assist to broaden your knowledge through experiences, such as when CR Surfacing Laboratories hosted a day where we observed how lenses were made. ODA is also a great source of ongoing training through newsletters, library resources and webinars on everything from lenses and frames through to new industry practices.

### 7. Why did you become a member of Optical Dispensers Australia, and what value do you see in the organisation?

I saw great value in joining a professional association. ODA provides me with a community to discuss problems and find solutions or learn by following other discussions. I also get access to a host of tools I can use in our practice. I wouldn't use an accountant that wasn't a CPA, so why wouldn't I join ODA?

### 8. What would you say to others thinking of joining Optical Dispensers Australia?

Stop thinking and join! There is a wealth of resources available to members that will benefit your patients, your practice and your career. ■



Chris Cunningham says helping people express their personality through frame selection excites her as a dispenser.