

At Issue: The effect of discount LASIK

Q: *At Issue* posed the following question to a panel of experts: "Has discount pricing affected your fee for LASIK? If not, do you expect to do so in 2001?"

A: **Emphasize quality, not price**

Noel Alpins, MD: When people buy goods and services there are a number of motivating factors. Price, convenience, quality, level of service and their satisfaction with the complete experience will affect their buying decisions. When patients come to us to have laser refractive surgery they are in effect "buying" better vision.

Some people, as with any transaction, are motivated solely by price and will always choose the cheapest procedure regardless of service or quality. However, we have found that price is not the highest priority for most of our patients.

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Most are concerned about the outcome, and aware that not all surgeons are necessarily the same. Many patients come to us from the recommendation of a previously treated patient.

We have found that, provided we offer a level of differentiation from our competitors in level of care, professionalism and patient satisfaction, then patients will choose to have surgery with us rather than the "discounters." By focusing on the complete service we offer and by building on our reputation as being the best in our area we have found that we have not had to adjust our fees.

Several years ago there was a "price war" between other laser clinics in our area. At the same time, laser refractive surgery received some very negative publicity. During this time we held

During this time our business obviously suffered. However, by staying firm, our patient numbers have increased over theirs and our reputation has grown. In contrast, the "discounters" have suffered major setbacks; one no longer has its own laser and another has closed. Based on our past experience we are unlikely in the future to lower our fees in response to the actions of a competitor.

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— Noel Alpins, MD

firm on our pricing. It was our belief that once you discount your fee to match a competitor's, then you lower the perceived quality of your service.