

At issue: ability to expand your practice

Q: *At Issue* posed the following question to an international panel of experts: "With the current economic climate in your country, is it feasible to expand your practice? If yes, how? If no, why?"

A: Conditions favor expansion

Noel A. Alpins, MD, FACS: The economic climate in Australia in the past 2 years has been relatively buoyant. External factors, such as economic slowdowns in the United States and Japan, the tragic events of Sept. 11 in

Noel A. Alpins, MD, FACS, can be reached at 7 Chesterville Rd., Cheltenham, VIC 3192, Australia; +(61) 3-9584-6122; fax: +(61) 3-9585-0995; e-mail: alpins@newvisionclinics.com.au.



New York and recent adverse publicity in North America regarding LASIK surgery, have had no perceivable negative impact on the demand for laser vision correction here. In fact, the recent slump in overseas travel as a result of the terrorist attacks has probably given people considering this surgery more time at home and surplus funds to act upon their plans to undergo treatment.

My practice enjoys continued growth for general ophthalmology as

well as cataract and refractive surgery. In-house optometry staff play an important role in comanagement and technical support. Their involvement in the entire therapeutic process enhances communication with patients both pre- and postoperatively. We are currently expanding professional and office staff numbers to effectively service patients whose expectations of both cataract and refractive surgery are high. Advances in technology such as laser and microkeratome capabilities are being upgraded together with the ongoing process of expansion in patient numbers and facility space.

In recent years the actual number of laser vision correction practices in Melbourne has diminished. Significantly, there has been no local participation by corporate players that might have affected the market. Fortunately, patients have become more educated in their selection of a surgical practitioner, relying on confidence in word-of-mouth referrals from friends and acquaintances. When it comes to extremes of advertised pricing and outcomes, there has been a healthy amount of consumer skepticism. Consequently, established practices that value patient loyalty continue to thrive and grow.

