

Eye Specialists make the most of Northland's beautiful sights

Having world-class eye surgery in Whangarei makes perfect sense given Northland's world class natural sights and scenery, according to local ophthalmology practice Eye Specialists.



Staff from left to right: Patti Simonsen, Jon Gulick, Maureen Penwarden, Anne Evans, Raewyn Andrew.

And who's going to argue, given the constant hum of activity at the busy surgery, and regional clinics around Northland, from people wanting to restore their eyes to tip-top condition.

Hundreds of patients pass through the practice of ophthalmologists Brian Kent-Smith and Wayne Birchall each month, accessing treatment for everything from dry eye to a detached retina.

First established in 2003, the practice has been a Southern Cross Affiliated Provider since 2007, and continues to go from strength to strength.

"We initially joined the programme because we thought it would be of benefit to our patients," says practice manager Lynne Grose. "We also saw potential benefits for our business through faster payment for our services and additional marketing opportunities."

Lynne estimates between 40 percent and 50 percent of Eye Specialists' patients are dealt with through Southern Cross' Affiliated Provider process. And up to 60 percent of the clinic's cataract surgery – a high value and high volume service – is "under Affiliated Provider".

Lynne is a strong advocate for the patient benefits of the Affiliated Provider programme. "First and foremost, patients feel safe coming to a Southern Cross Affiliated Provider," she says.

"And, because we manage the prior approval and claims process for the patient, there's reduced anxiety for them about the paperwork and payment. Southern Cross members know before the service is provided that they are covered and, if they have a policy where they pay part of their treatment costs, they know what their co-payment is going to be.

"Especially for people with eye problems, not having to go through prior approval and claim processes is a huge positive."

The Affiliated Provider process fits perfectly with a range of other attributes of

Eye Specialists' services designed to make surgery as easy as possible for patients.

"We have Registered Nurses who work through the clinic and theatre areas to provide continuity of care, and dedicated "hand-holders" for surgical patients. We do 98 percent of our cataract surgery under local anaesthetic with only about 3 percent of those patients requiring sedation" says Lynne.

"This reflects our strong focus on reducing patient anxiety and enabling the fastest possible recovery from surgery."

Lynne also believes the Southern Cross Affiliated Provider programme has benefits for a healthy business, as well as healthy patients.

"The online prior approval and claim process provides us with confidence around prompt payment, and it is very beneficial for cash flow. If there are issues of any sort, we have a dedicated Relationship Manager at Southern Cross we can talk to."

Lynne also points to the marketing benefits of being able to promote their status as a Southern Cross Affiliated Provider, and the online and Affiliated Provider directory listings that are regularly promoted to Southern Cross members and referrers.

"We think being able to see and experience the joys of Northland should be reason enough for people to visit Eye Specialists, but the Affiliated Provider relationship with Southern Cross is certainly another big positive."



Dr Brian Kent-Smith does an eye examination through a slit lamp.