could sense the frustration in the doctor’s voice: “You’ve got to help us figure out what’s wrong with our front-desk staff. My partners and I spend too much time standing around in the exam lane area waiting for patients to be processed at the front desk. I don’t know why the receptionists can’t get them registered quicker.” We spoke a little longer, as I asked him questions and he provided the best answers he could. Before I left, I asked his office manager to send me 2 specific data points.

Benchmarking in action. A few days later we spoke again. I told him that the median number of patient encounters per full-time equivalent* receptionist was 2,800 per year. “Would you care to guess how many encounters your 2 receptionists are handling per year?” He didn’t know, but because I had posed the question, he surmised that it was more than 2,800. “You’re right,” I confirmed, “Your staff handle about 3,600 encounters per year per full-time person, which is well above the 75th percentile. There may be some ways to streamline what they are doing so patients are processed faster, but the bottom line is this—your practice needs more help at your front desk!”

Having a benchmark for the number of encounters the front desk staff should be expected to handle per year allowed us to quickly identify one cause of the problem this doctor’s practice was experiencing.

Know the Vital Signs of Practice Management

Benchmarks for ophthalmology practices are analogous to the vital signs that physicians measure in their patients before prescribing treatments. Suppose, for example, a patient presents with a blood pressure of 180/110. That reading would have limited value without a benchmark to compare it against; but an internist, aware that the benchmark is 120/80, would be concerned about the elevated pressure and would seek to identify and treat the underlying cause. In the same way, financial and patient flow benchmarks help you detect areas of your business that are not within normal limits.

AcadeMetrics benchmarks were developed specifically for ophthalmology practices. The Academy and AAOE provide a service—called AcadeMetrics—that enables you to compare your practice’s financial and patient flow results with other, similar practices.

AcadeMetrics has 72 benchmarks. These include the following:

- **Overhead ratio**—judge how efficient your practice is in converting collections into cash for the owners.
- **Physician productivity ratios by subspecialty**—gauge whether your providers are seeing a typical number of patients and generating normal revenues.
- **Employee productivity ratios**—understand whether you have enough staff in various areas of the practice.
- **Accounts receivable ratios**—monitor your billing staff’s effectiveness in collecting money owed to you.
- **Optical ratios**—analyze the profitability of your optical operations.
Many of the 72 benchmarks are unique to the AcadeMetrics survey and are not published elsewhere. Only data that are required to generate the benchmarks are collected, and practices that do not have an optical shop or a physician in a particular subspecialty can skip those fields.

**AcadeMetrics—How to Start Benchmarking Your Practice**

By participating in the AcadeMetrics survey, you’ll be able to access detailed comparison reports that will help you to identify the specific strengths and weaknesses of your practice.

**How it works.** Each spring, ophthalmology practices start entering their data from the previous fiscal year. The resulting benchmarks and comparative reports will be available only to practices that complete at least 50% of the AcadeMetrics survey; the data won’t be available for purchase by nonparticipants.

**How to sign in.** Sign in to the AcadeMetrics survey as follows:

- If your practice is new to AcadeMetrics, register at [https://academetrics.aao.org/academetrics_signup.aspx](https://academetrics.aao.org/academetrics_signup.aspx)
- If your practice is a past participant in AcadeMetrics, you can use the same login that you used in previous years at [https://academetrics.aao.org/](https://academetrics.aao.org/)

**Your data are confidential.** Your data will not be seen by other AcadeMetrics participants. Identifiers specific to your practice will be stripped from the final dataset, and the reporting tools will only display datasets that include a minimum of 10 items. (This minimum applies to both complete aggregated datasets and to any filtered dataset.)

**Start using the benchmarks.** You will be able to start comparing your performance against certain benchmarks as soon as you submit your data; other benchmarks will become available once enough participants complete the survey.

**What does it cost?** AcadeMetrics is free for Academy and AAOE members.

**When can you get started?** To find out when the AcadeMetrics benchmarking tool will open for collection of data from the 2017 fiscal year, see [aao.org/academetrics](https://academetrics.aao.org/academetrics).