



## The Importance of Certification: Strengthening Your Eye Care Team

Following the 2007 publication of the groundbreaking scientific study titled, "A Comparative Study of the Impact of Certified and Non-Certified Ophthalmic Medical Personnel on Practice Quality and Productivity," leading physicians and researchers established concrete, physical data that illustrates the benefits of certification for ophthalmic personnel. Certified personnel outperformed non-certified personnel in virtually every category of measurement. In the end, the study concluded that an overwhelming four out of five physicians agreed that certified personnel rendered their practice more effective than their non-certified counterparts.

The findings of the study have opened an important dialogue on the value of certification for personnel in the field of ophthalmology. Statistically, the benefits of employing certified personnel cannot be refuted, but for many practices, supporting certified personnel means more than simply giving them a place to work. The career support many practices give to their staff is an establishment of trust and validation of the contributions personnel make to a practice.

Many practices have begun to take important steps to ensure their personnel are both highly trained and highly appreciated. For Suzi Martin, PhD, and the practice team at the Cape Coral Eye Center in Cape Coral, FL, the value of certification is a message they have been actively promoting for over 25 years. Using "Knowledge is Power" as their practice motto, Cape Coral Eye Center has managed to transform the quality of care, practice unity, and overall practice productivity. For the first time in the organization's 28-year history, 100% of their personnel are JCAHPO-certified. Practice administrators discovered early on that certified staff helped positively shape the image of the practice in the community, and the overall eye care experience patients receive.

"Patients repeatedly tell us that the main reason they keep coming back to Cape Coral Eye Center is because our ophthalmic personnel are highly trained. Technicians and assistants are typically the first encounter patients have with our practice, and if personnel are knowledgeable and well-trained, an immediate trust is established between the patient and our practice," states Martin.

She added that "Knowledge is Power" is an adage they integrated based on patient feedback. In her experience, patients have been overwhelmingly impressed with staff training and certification, to date.

As important as it is to create lasting relationships built on trust with patients, a significant part of practice success can be directly linked to the relationships within the practice. At the end of the day, associations and morale among employees affect future interactions with patients. Practices that foster the development of trust and respect reap the long-term rewards. "We encourage our personnel to invest their time and efforts in training, certification, and on

becoming career-minded," says Martin. "It's very simple: when they make the effort, we make the effort."

Like many clinics around the country, Cape Coral Eye Center is using certification to get employees excited about a career as a certified ophthalmic assistant or technician. The organization achieves this through several supportive enterprises. They encourage personnel using a staff newsletter to highlight career excellence, framing certification credentials on the practice's lobby walls, and issuing name tags and pins that denote certification levels. These small actions establish practice-wide pride, and send a message to patients that personnel are passionate,



Left: Ophthalmic personnel certification credentials on Cape Coral lobby wall. Right: Personnel nametags with JCAHPO level of designation.

valued, and highly qualified. In the end, simple displays of appreciation and respect have resulted in a more efficient, unified practice. "Now that everyone in the practice is certified at some level, morale is higher than it's ever been. Most importantly, patients see personnel working hard to maintain certification and they feel safe in the care of trained professionals," she adds.

The level of morale Martin speaks of is only amplified when a greater percentage of staff are certified. Another added benefit of employing certified personnel is that it creates a level of trust and confidence among all clinical staff. Members of a clinic can work together more constructively because certification is a representation of training and job proficiency. To patients, personnel, and physicians, JCAHPO designation is a mark that carries respect and trust.

The importance of certification for ophthalmic personnel is a message JCAHPO actively promotes. Certified personnel contribute positively to the productivity of a practice and help physicians more effectively manage clinic time and resources. JCAHPO certification guarantees that personnel will have the technical knowledge and training to perform at optimum capacity and positively contribute to the success of a practice. Supporting certification is a way for physicians to demonstrate commitment to their staff and create a professional relationship that benefits the practice, employees, and most importantly, the patient.

For information on a career as a certified ophthalmic technician, visit [www.jcahpo.org](http://www.jcahpo.org) or [www.myeyecareer.org](http://www.myeyecareer.org).

## Surf's Up Maui

Personnel seeking continuing education credit in retina-related sub-specialties will have the opportunity to do so this fall with a continuing education (CE) program in tropical Hawaii. JCAHPO, in cooperation with the American Society of Retina Specialists (ASRS), will host a unique specialty CE program October 11-13, 2008, in Maui, HI. The event will give personnel the opportunity to earn CE credit, enhance training, and learn from a selection of internationally prominent retina specialists. A total of 18 JCAHPO credits will be available to attendees at the two-and-a-half day program in October.

Some of the courses available for JCAHPO credit in Maui include:

- AMD TechTrax<sup>SM</sup>
- B-Scan Protocol
- Inflammatory Diseases of the Retina
- OCT Imaging, Spectral Domain, and *many more!*

The focus of the Maui program will be on important new treatment innovations in the area of retina specialty, but the program is open to personnel of all experience levels and eye care backgrounds. In addition to courses on diabetic retinopathy and inflammatory retina infections, the program will also offer several general ophthalmology courses for credit, including the exclusive JCAHPO specialty program, AMD TechTrax<sup>SM</sup>. A total of 17 courses will be available to personnel at the event. Attendees will also have the opportunity to experience an onsite Exhibit Hall devoted to the latest in retina-related field and instrument developments.

We encourage you to join us in Hawaii for this unique CE program. Get involved and help support continuing education for ophthalmic medical personnel. Visit [www.jcahpo.org](http://www.jcahpo.org) for additional information on JCAHPO Continuing Education programs.

## 17,000 Strong - Number of Certified Personnel Reaches All-Time High

JCAHPO is pleased to announce the crossing of an important milestone in the organization's history. Late this spring, the number of JCAHPO certificants officially surpassed 17,000 personnel worldwide. The number of JCAHPO certificants continues to grow despite the current personnel shortage in ophthalmology.

Studies have shown that certification is a personally rewarding and lucrative career path. Certification increases practice productivity, enhances the quality of care, and gives personnel the confidence and training to perform effectively in a clinical setting.

As an organization, JCAHPO has come a long way since the day a small collection of ophthalmologists met in Chicago for what would prove to be the start of a groundbreaking movement in American eye care. Today, after 39 years of certifying ophthalmic medical personnel worldwide, JCAHPO and its 19 member organizations have helped shape the field of ophthalmology and improve the overall quality of care for patients around the world.

Reaching this milestone is a remarkable feat, and we certainly could not have done it without the dedicated efforts of physicians and personnel from around the world. We look forward to maintaining quality, global CE resources, and certification for personnel in ophthalmology in the years to come!

For information on JCAHPO or a career as a certified ophthalmic assistant or technician, visit [www.jcahpo.org](http://www.jcahpo.org) or call (800) 284-3937.

## JCAHPO, OMIC to Offer Specialty Courses Online

In an effort to expand JCAHPO's online course catalog, we are proud to announce a new partnership with the Ophthalmic Mutual Insurance Company (OMIC®). In the coming months, JCAHPO will work with OMIC to launch a series of online risk management courses to address liability and practice protocol for ophthalmic personnel. Three courses have been developed for continuing education (CE) credit on JCAHPO's independent study Web site [www.myjcahpoce.org](http://www.myjcahpoce.org), with plans for additional risk-management courses.

Personnel will have the opportunity to study and earn credit for the three initial risk management-related courses: "Responding to Unanticipated Outcomes," "Documentation of Ophthalmic Care," and "Ophthalmic Anesthesia Liability." Supported by an unrestricted educational grant from Allergan Inc., JCAHPO's online course Web site [www.myjcahpoce.org](http://www.myjcahpoce.org) offers a broad range of additional courses for personnel in several specialty areas.

The JCAHPO/OMIC courses highlight the importance of communicating with patients honestly, appropriately documenting practice procedures, and understanding the current regulatory boundaries of practice liability. These courses expand the catalog of existing quality CE courses that JCAHPO currently offers, and we are excited about the opportunity to begin training personnel to help manage this increasingly relevant issue in modern practice management.

Visit [www.myjcahpoce.org](http://www.myjcahpoce.org) for updates regarding new and existing course information.

## OCS Exam Measures Coding, Billing Knowledge

JCAHPO and the American Academy of Ophthalmic Executives (AAOE) are partners in providing ophthalmic professionals with the Ophthalmic Coding Specialist (OCS) exam. The OCS exam is designed to help assess the competency of ophthalmic personnel with regard to coding and billing. In modern eye practices, appropriate coding and billing have become a central part of effective practice management, yet due to consistent changes, their importance often remains overlooked by physicians and clinic administrators. As American Academy of Ophthalmology Coding Executive, Sue Vicchilli, COT, OCS, observes, it is a core issue many clinics need to address on a more consistent basis.

"Statistical data from third-party audits places the number of incorrectly submitted claims in practices as high as 40 percent," says Vicchilli. "As a result, physicians are being forced to focus less on the practice of ophthalmology and more on the business of resubmitting incorrectly submitted claims. This issue is relevant and vital because it directly affects practice success and efficiency."

Personnel who study and earn this ophthalmic designation have an opportunity to directly affect economic health, and help clinics take the appropriate steps to exact positive change. As Vicchilli notes, documentation and claim submission are a germane, fundamental part of practice

management. Poor execution and improper procedure in this sector can ultimately be detrimental to a practice's survival. The biggest hurdle for practices in this area appears to be rather simple: lack of information.

"Many ophthalmic personnel simply learned coding inappropriately or have not remained current on new procedures," says Vicchilli. "This behavior prohibits maximum reimbursement and it is reflected in the bottom line."

The OCS exam is designed to assess the tools personnel are using in a practice setting, and reeducate or reintroduce them to proper coding and billing methods. It is also a way for clinics to improve efficiency, demonstrate a commitment to staff, and expose ophthalmic personnel to suitable coding and billing techniques.

JCAHPO is pleased to work together with AAOE in examination development and administration to help practices improve efficiency and maximize accountability. By providing even a single representative from a practice with up-to-date, proper coding and billing procedure, practices can influence the tendencies of all employees and make necessary progress.

"As ophthalmic personnel, this is core competency and a task we do every day. We need to do it better," adds Vicchilli.

The examination is an open-book test consisting of 105 multiple-choice questions covering 18 aspects of ophthalmic coding. Participants have 10 working days to complete the exam. The OCS designation is valid for three years and is worth a total of 4 JCAHPO Group A continuing education (CE) credits.

Visit [www.jcahpo.org](http://www.jcahpo.org) and view the JCAHPO & ATPO order form online for additional testing information.

## Web Launch a Success!

The new interactive face of JCAHPO was officially launched late this spring, and the response received from users has been overwhelmingly positive. The new appearance, navigation convenience, and up-to-date news links are just some of the changes to [www.jcahpo.org](http://www.jcahpo.org).

We are grateful to personnel who helped us test-run the site prior to launch, to ensure that online resources were useful, and relevant to ophthalmic personnel. The redesign is making an impact and will be highlighted in the August 2008 issue of Ophthalmology Management magazine. We are pleased with the positive feedback we continue to receive from users worldwide, and are excited about the new opportunities now available for personnel online.

## Performance Test Reminder

A reminder that the upcoming COMT Full Performance Test, scheduled for September 20th, 2008, is the last opportunity for new candidates to participate in the closing installment of the hands-on Performance Test. The fall examination is the final opportunity to begin the performance-testing portion of certification until later in 2009, when we begin exclusively offering a computer-simulated version of the COMT Performance Test.

As a prerequisite, candidates wishing to participate in the September 20th Performance Test are required to have passed the COMT multiple-choice examination and applied for the Performance Test by August 8, 2008.

<b>JCAHPO EVENT CALENDAR</b>	
<b>Event</b>	<b>Date</b>
Las Vegas, NV	September 12-13
Washington, DC	September 13
Surgical Assisting Detroit, MI	September 20
Hilton Head Island, SC	September 26-27
Maui, HI (ASRS)	October 11-13
Buffalo, NY (ATPO)	October 17
Atlanta, GA (ACE)	November 7-11

## 2008 Scholarship Recipients

### Certification Scholarships

Congratulations to the following individuals who have demonstrated commitment and/or excellence in the field of ophthalmic assisting. Each received a voucher to offset expenses of certification examinations.

Barbara Bailes, COT, Cumming, GA  
 Donna Caron, Kent, WA  
 Jane Colli, COT, Lodi, CA  
 Chandra Franse, COA, Stockton, CA  
 Gail Grundy, New Bedford, MA  
 Cathy Maxwell, COA, Hurricane, UT  
 Mimi Mazuk, Belton, TX  
 Angela Palermo, Chapel Hill, NC  
 Amanda Saturnus, Cheektawaga, NY

### Continuing Education and Training Program Scholarships

Continuing Education and Training Program Scholarship recipients will be announced in the next issue of Eye Lights.

Scholarship guidelines and applications will be available in January 2009 at the JCAHPO Education and Research Foundation Web site.

## Planned Giving

A planned gift to the JCAHPO Education and Research Foundation reinforces a lifetime of professional commitment to the field of ophthalmology. Your gift to the Foundation will help support JCAHPO's mission, the educational opportunities of ophthalmic personnel worldwide, and the development of high standards and innovation in patient care. Through a planned gift, let the Foundation guarantee your service and heritage live on.

Visit the JCAHPO Education and Research Foundation Web site at [www.jcahpo.org/foundation/](http://www.jcahpo.org/foundation/) and read more about planned giving opportunities.