

Decoding the Paraoptometric

Rosemarie L. Lobley-VanZant, CPOT, CPOC

Author's Note

The information in the following slides have been gathered from a combination of the AOA website and “The Bridge” PowerPoint presentation that was provided to me by Joan Abney of the AOA Paraoptometric Resource Center. I am truly indebted to Joan for all her help over the past years.

What is a Paraoptometric?

A Paraoptometric is a person that has been trained either on the job or formally (depending on the requirements of the State they will be working in) that can assist the Optometrist in varying degrees before, during, and after an exam. They have also achieved national certification that shows they understand, apply, and use that knowledge in the concepts of optometric care.

There are varying degrees of Paraoptometric certification that will be broken down over the next few pages to help you understand the opportunities that are available to our current member doctors and their staff.

There are 3 levels of certification. . . .

CPO (Certified Paraoptometric)

CPOA (Certified Paraoptometric Assistant)

C POT (Certified Paraoptometric Technician)

There is 1 level of specialty certification. . .

CPOC (Certified Paraoptometric Coder)

There 1 level of Assessment certification. . .

OAA (Optometric Administrative Assessment)

CPO - Certified Paraoptometric

“A CPO is a person who has attained national recognition via certification by demonstrating an understanding of the concepts used in optometric care.”

-the AOA website

This is the first certification – and one of the easiest to obtain for a staff member. If interested in obtaining the CPO certification, one must be able to perform and be familiar with the basic duties within the practice setting.

In order to apply to sit for the CPO test you must have had at least 6 months mentored experience and a high school diploma or equivalent.

Cost to sit for the CPO exam is \$265.00

Renewal is required every 3 years with 18 hours of continuing education and a fee of \$90.00

The exam is made up of 100 multiple choice questions focusing on 4 main sections.

- Basic Science – Anatomy, common eye disorders, terminology, surgery, and basic pharmacology.
- Clinical Principles and Procedures – Eye examination, refractive status, and contact lenses.
- Ophthalmic Optics and Dispensing – Ophthalmic prescriptions, ophthalmic lenses and ophthalmic dispensing.
- Professional Issues – Eye care specialists and ancillary personnel and practice management.

CPOA - Certified Paraoptometric Assistant

“A CPOA is a person who has attained national recognition via certification by demonstrating the ability to apply the concepts used in optometric care.”

-the AOA website

This is the next step on your certification journey. If interested in obtaining the CPOA certification, one must be able to perform and be familiar with the basic technical duties within the practice setting.

Technical duties may include, but are not limited to. . .taking patient histories, measuring visual acuity, performing automatic tonometry. . .the list goes on.

In order to apply to sit for the CPOA test you must meet one of the following 3 qualifications. . . .

- At least 6 months as a certified CPO
- Be a graduate or current student (in your last semester) of an approved optometric assistant program
- Have had at least 5 years in the optometric field, have a letter of verification from your employer, and receive approval from the CPC to bypass the CPO.

Cost to sit for the CPOA exam is \$285.00

Renewal is required every 3 years with 18 hours of continuing education and a fee of \$90.00

CPOA - Certified Paraoptometric Assistant (continued)

“A CPOA is a person who has attained national recognition via certification by demonstrating the ability to apply the concepts used in optometric care.”

-the AOA website

The exam is made up of 200 multiple choice questions focusing on 6 main sections.

- Practice Management – Patient education, practice management, telephone techniques, patient recall, office finances, professional issues, and health information technology.
- Testing and Procedures – Purpose and preliminary testing procedures and recording, papillary responses, case history, visual acuity, color vision, stereo acuity, and examination instrumentation.
- Ophthalmic Optics and Dispensing – Prescriptions, lenses, frame selection, dispensing, and adjustments.
- Special Procedures – Contact lenses, tonometry, visual fields, sphygmomanometry, first aid, CPR, emergencies, vision rehabilitation, and surgery.
- Refractive Status of the Eye and Binocularity – Refractive errors, refractive conditions, and eye movements.
- Basic Ocular Anatomy and Physiology – General anatomy and physiology, basic functions of anatomical structures, common pathological and functional disorders, and basic ocular pharmacology.

CPOT - Certified Paraoptometric Technician

“A CPOT is a person who has attained national recognition via certification by demonstrating the ability to understand, apply, and interrelate the concepts used in optometric care.”

-the AOA website

This is considered the final step on your certification journey and it is one of the hardest to achieve.

If interested in obtaining the CPOT certification, one must be able to perform and be familiar with the technical duties but also able to take on a leadership role within the practice setting as well.

Cost to sit for the CPOT exam is \$285.00

Renewal is required every 3 years with 18 hours of continuing education and a fee of \$90.00

In order to apply to sit for the CPOT test you must meet one of the following 2 qualifications. . . .

- At least 6 months as a certified CPOA
- Be a graduate or current student (in your last semester) of an Accreditation Council on Optometric Education approved optometric technician program.

CPOT - Certified Paraoptometric Technician (continued)

“A CPOT is a person who has attained national recognition via certification by demonstrating the ability to understand, apply, and interrelate the concepts used in optometric care.”

-the AOA website

The exam is made up of 225 multiple choice questions focusing on 6 main sections.

- Practice Management – Office management, professional issues, government rules and regulations, and health information technology.
- Pre-Testing Procedures – Case history, visual acuity, vision screening and preliminary testing techniques, color vision, and stereo acuity.
- Ophthalmic Optics and Dispensing – Optical principles of light, prescriptions, lenses, frame selection, and adjustment.
- Clinical Procedures – Corneal Topography/Automated Keratometry, tonometry, visual fields, sphygmomanometry, contact lenses, vision therapy, triage and first aid, vision rehabilitation, and special ocular procedures.
- Refractive Status of the Eye and Binocularity – Refractive errors, refractive conditions, eye movements and binocular vision.
- Anatomy and Physiology – General anatomy and physiology, eye anatomy, and pharmacology.

CPOC - Certified Paraoptometric Coder

“A CPOC is a person who has attained national recognition via certification by demonstrating proficiency, expertise, and validating superior knowledge in an optometric coding environment.”

-the AOA website

This is considered a specialty certification and is aimed at the office staff that primarily handle billing and coding.

It is a benefit to the practice as a whole to have a certified coder on the staff – not only is it a way to have a check/balance system in place to ensure proper billing but it allows the practice to stay on top of the ever changing laws/requirements set forth by the government and insurance companies.

In order to apply to sit for the CPOC test you must have had at least 2 years experience in the medical coding and billing field and a high school diploma or equivalent.

The exam is made up of 125 multiple choice questions that focuses on anatomy and physiology, medical terminology, CPT and ICD-9 codes, medical records, claim filing, and compliance matters.

Best part is – it’s open book!

The two books that are allowed for use during testing are the 2013 Codes for Optometry and the most recent CPT Standard Edition.

Cost to sit for the CPOC exam is \$265.00

Renewal is required every 3 years with 18 hours of continuing education and a fee of \$80.00

OAA - Optometric Administrative Assessment

This is also considered a specialty certification that is aimed at practice managers, office administrators, front office personnel, and support staff. It is meant to help develop a foundation of skills and knowledge that are required in an optometric practice.

This is also the first in a series of specialized assessment based certificate programs developed by the CPC.

There are no requirements in order to apply for this test. The beauty is that this is a take home test that can be done after hours by your staff members.

Cost for the initial package which includes the DVD, a test booklet, and an official Scantron form is \$189.00.

If you have additional staff that would like to get certified you only need to purchase the additional test booklets and Scantron forms for \$75.00 each.

OAA - Optometric Administrative Assessment (continued)

The DVD consists of 4 units. . .

UNIT 1 – Financial Management and Professional Issues

Deals with general financial office administration including developing and maintaining a budget, forecasting and revenue projecting and financial control. It also addresses professional relations, ethics, conduct, liability, and malpractice.

UNIT 2 – Assisting Foundation

Covers a multitude of first aid procedures, safety precautions, basic procedures in taking a patient history, and protective standards.

UNIT 3 – Practice Administration

Introduces you to insurance, coding and billing, keeping the patient flow functional, and general front office skills. It also includes HIPAA regulations and emphasizes organizational, time, and inventory management skills.

UNIT 4 – Human Resources and Time Management

This unit highlights the essentials for basic human resource management including personnel responsibilities such as writing job descriptions, administrative procedures and manuals.

Paraoptometric Benefits

Currently the AOA offers the following benefits to certified and non-certified Paraoptometric members. . .

- 6 FREE continuing education hours a year. You are also given access to the Article Archive, where over 40+ topics are covered for additional training, and the Online training section, where you can complete the Paraoptometric
- No separate member fees – staff members are enrolled by their AOA member optometrist at no additional cost to the OD!
- Discounted rates at Optometry’s Meeting – with the ability to attend any class held.
- Discounted rates in the AOA Marketplace to purchase study materials or office education supplies.
- The ability to volunteer within your profession on several committees and work with seasoned veterans in the profession – creating lifelong friendships.

My hope is that the MOA will adopt some of these benefits in the future.

Currently the State of Maryland has 11 Paraoptometrics registered as AOA Associate members.

Paraoptometric Support

Paraoptometrics are supported nationwide with the backing of the AOA Paraoptometric Resource Center and the Commission of Paraoptometric Certification.

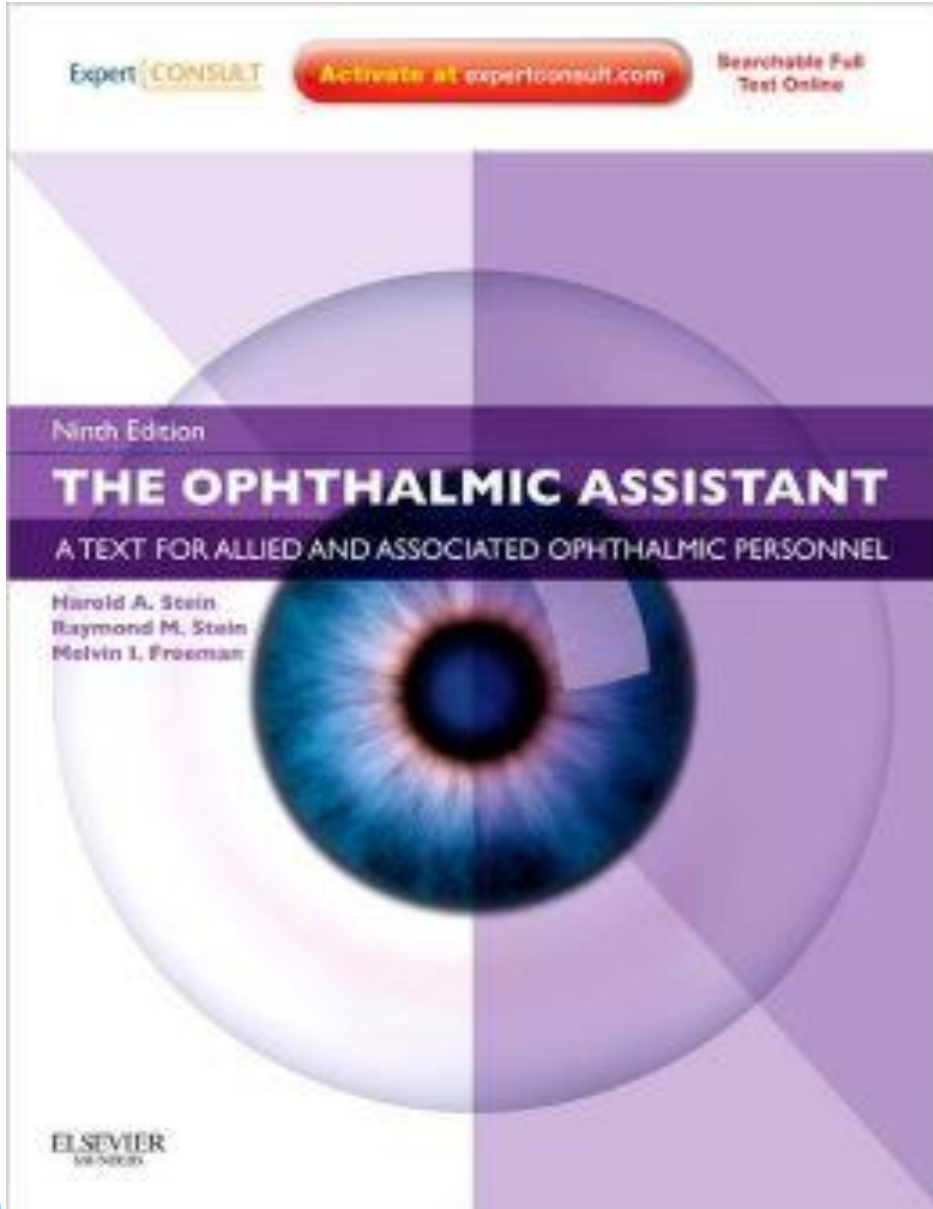
The Commission of Paraoptometric Certification administers and governs the certification program and examinations.

My hope is the MOA will be able to model a committee after the Paraoptometric Resource Center so that we are able to provide the same support to local Paraoptometrics.

The Paraoptometric Resource Center has several areas that it focuses on. . .

- Providing education
- Service recognition – including The Paraoptometric of the Year award
- Professional development and promotion
- Opportunities for members to get involved – including joining committees that help the profession in a variety of ways.

The Holy Grail



An indispensable tool to any staff member, regardless of what level certification they are at, is “The Ophthalmic Assistant : A Text for Allied and Associates Ophthalmic Personnel” by Harold Stein. It covers everything you need to know, want to know, and things you didn't even know about the eyes and the ophthalmic profession.

I highly recommend each office have this in their possession not only for their staff to use during their certification journey but as an excellent reference tool.

The current edition is the 9th edition. It is available at Barnes & Noble for \$76.60

Additional AOA Resources

Some additional AOA Resources are available in the AOA Marketplace. . .not only can you purchase study materials for each of the previous certifications mentioned but you can also purchase the following. . .

- Patient education information on nutrition and the diseases that they are face with, to just name a few.
- Educational art work for the office or hands-on 3-D models.
- Office supplies such as the new HCFA forms and the latest CPT/ICD books

You can also connect with Paraoptometrics around the country via the AOACConnect online portal. It is filled with forums dedicated to various projects the AOA is involved with.

Getting Registered

Some additional AOA Resources are available in the AOA Marketplace. . .not only can you purchase study materials for each of the previous certifications mentioned but you can also purchase the following. . .

- Log-in to www.aoa.org
- Under the Optometrist tab, click My Profile/My AOA
- Click on the “Manage Staff” tab
- Enter information for each staff member that is a non-OD
 - You will need the following from each staff member
 - Legal name of staff (as it appears on their Drivers License)
 - Date of Birth
 - Unique email address for each staff member

If you have any questions or need help – contact the PRC@aoa.org or 800-365-2219 ext. 4108

About the Author

My name is Rosemarie Lobley-VanZant, CPOT, CPOC. I have worked in the optometric field since the age of 13 – it's hard to believe that was 14 years ago! Since 2004 I have owned and operated a successful optometry practice in Chestertown, MD

My certification journey started in 2007 at the wedding of a dear friend (who happened to be a rep for B&L) who was kind enough to put me at a table with an OD from the Philadelphia area. During the reception the OD talked to me about how she had all her office staff at some level of certification and how it was vital to the profession to be educated. She recommended for me to purchase the book mentioned on the previous page and get in contact with the AOA.

I sat for my CPOA in 2008 and passed it on my first attempt. I set my sights on the CPOT (which at that time consisted of a practical and a written test) at Optometry's Meeting in 2009. I passed the written but was unsuccessful on the practical. I attempted again the practical again at Optometry's Meeting in 2010 and finally passed it at Optometry's Meeting in 2012. I also sat for my CPOC in 2012 and successfully passed it at Optometry's Meeting. I passed the OAA in the fall of 2013.

I have served on the AOA Diabetic Initiative, which helped to redesign the Diabetic information handed to ODs and patients across the United States. I have volunteered for the past 2 years on the AOA Education Committee helping to develop and review continuing education for Paraoptometric members.

I have a passion for my profession and am thrilled to help both the AOA and the MOA join together to get more Paraoptometrics on the map. I hope as we go forward this year as a group we can work together to make this happen.

If anyone has any questions – please feel free to email me at phillyfordchick@Hotmail.com and I will be happy to answer them. I hope in the future I will be able to participate in Board meetings and I can't wait to meet everyone in November at the Fall Conference.

