

Current Perspective

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The Team It Takes

The availability of well-trained ophthalmic technician staff remains a persistent concern across our community. Difficulties in recruiting and retaining these vital care team members that emerged well before the COVID pandemic have only worsened in the aftermath and continue to present challenges.

This dilemma has prompted us to reexamine the critical role that the Academy plays in supporting physicians who deliver ophthalmic care across the country. Practices and patients rely on a diverse team of ophthalmic technicians, orthoptists, photographers, nurses, scribes, coders, and practice managers to name but a few. Recognizing just how important all members of this team are, what responsibility does the Academy bear in confronting this specific challenge?

To answer this question, it helps to return to the Academy's mission statement: "to protect sight and empower lives by serving as an advocate for patients and the public, leading ophthalmic education, and advancing the profession of ophthalmology." This affirms that our responsibility extends beyond exclusively supporting our individual physician members. To that end, the Academy has launched a program that explores opportunities to better support the clinical team staff who are so important to our practices.

The acute national ophthalmic technician crisis has been a focal point of this initiative. There are opportunities to connect at every stage of a technician's professional life from raising awareness of the career opportunity to recruitment, education, professional development, and continuing education credits. Our technician community has long relied upon the Association of Technical Personnel in Ophthalmology (ATPO), but specialized professional organizations such as this find it increasingly difficult to operate under the current constraints of the health care environment.

The Academy and ATPO leadership therefore embarked on a series of discussions aimed at finding ways for the Academy to better support the clinical teams community. Ultimately, we have mutually decided to bring the ATPO into the Academy and to create a new membership group for our technicians. The goal is to improve recruitment, retention, productivity, and the professional satisfaction of our technician workforce through an infrastructure that provides

educational materials, access to the annual meeting, professional development, and community support. A transition agreement has been approved by the ATPO's Board and affirmed by a vote from the full ATPO membership.

While the Academy is grateful for the opportunity to serve our technician community, we recognize that similar professional and educational needs are shared by others on the care delivery team. The Academy Board of Trustees has therefore endorsed a broader initiative: the establishment within the Academy of the American Academy of Ophthalmic Professionals™ (AAOP™; aao.org/aaop), which will serve as the new home for ophthalmic allied health groups. This infrastructure allows us to expand the Academy's support to other members of our care team even as we begin by developing our services to effectively meet the needs of technicians, and thereby our physicians' practices, and our patients.

We welcome our technician colleagues to the Academy and remain fully committed to supporting every aspect of ophthalmic care in pursuit of our mission as we strive to protect sight and empower lives.



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AAOP MEMBER BENEFITS

AAOP offers training and resources for clinical staff.

AAO 2023. Discounted registration and technician track at the Academy's annual meeting.

AAOP-Talk. Members-only online community.

Clinical Teams Express. Quarterly email newsletter.

Discounts at the Academy Store. Up to 40% off training, education, and coding tools.

Learn more at aao.org/aaop.