

Academy Notebook

NEWS • TIPS • RESOURCES

WHAT'S HAPPENING

One Year of Academy COVID-19 Updates

On April 16, 2020, the Academy emailed its members the first “COVID-19 Updates” newsletter. To help ophthalmologists navigate the pandemic’s challenges, the newsletter provided the newest information from the Academy about clinical research, practice management and financial issues, and implementation of telemedicine. That first email included initial results from a series of pulse surveys intended to reveal the pandemic’s effect on ophthalmology practices, an invitation to attend a relief grants webinar, and a formal introduction to the Academy’s COVID-19 resource page (aao.org/coronavirus), which had launched in late January.

The Academy later phased out the dedicated newsletter and incorporated the “COVID-19 Updates” into the weekly *Academy Express* newsletter. These updates continue to be an important way for members to learn about the latest pandemic news and resources from the Academy, including patient education and guidance for running your practice safely.

For COVID-19 news, watch for the “COVID-19 Updates” in *Academy Express* every Wednesday and go to aao.org/coronavirus for complete coverage.



COVID-19 NEWS. This month marks the anniversary of the first issue of the Academy’s “COVID-19 Updates” newsletter.

TAKE NOTICE

Support Academy Programs

A donor advised fund, which is like a charitable savings account, gives you the flexibility to recommend how much and how often you grant money to the Academy Foundation and other qualified charities. It’s an efficient way to make an immediate impact on the success of Academy programs, such as the Ophthalmic Education Fund/ONE Network or the Minority Ophthalmology Mentoring program.

Learn more at aao.org/daf.

Volunteer Opportunity: Write for *Practice Management Express*

The American Academy of Ophthalmic Executives (AAOE), the Academy’s practice management affiliate, welcomes new writers for its weekly newsletter. *Practice Management Express* offers information on running a successful ophthalmic practice. Write a 500- to 800-word article that

focuses on providing strategies, tips, and other resources that members can immediately implement in their practices. Story topics include alternate revenue sources, business operations, coding and reimbursement, the Merit-Based Incentive Payment System, risk management, personal growth, and more. Before you start writing, contact the AAOE program manager to discuss your proposed topic.

Learn how to get started by visiting aao.org/volunteering and choosing “Write.” (This is just one of many Academy volunteer opportunities.)

Ask the Ethicist: Reporting Suspected Medicare Fraud

Q: I have performed second opinion exams on several patients of a local ophthalmologist. The patients’ main complaints appear to be blurry vision caused by cataracts; however, these patients have all been told that they have glaucoma and are scheduled for combined cataract extraction with iStent implantation. My exams indi-



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cate normal or near normal nerve fiber layers and cupping. None of the patients have been started on drops or have recorded high IOPs. I think the planned glaucoma surgery may be fraudulent. I don't want to say anything negative to the patients, but should I report my suspicions elsewhere?

A: Yes, Medicare/Medicaid fraud is not a victimless crime; fraud raises health care costs for everyone, and unnecessary surgery victimizes patients. Unnecessary surgery and misrepresentation of services are serious ethical violations. While you might want to avoid negative statements about a colleague, it is important to give patients your honest opinion on what you believe is in their best interests. You may want to tell patients that while you agree that they will likely benefit from cataract surgery, the need for an iStent in their case is less clear-cut.

Health care fraud is a deliberate deception or misrepresentation of services that results in an unauthorized reimbursement. Health care abuse refers to practices that are inconsistent with accepted medical, business, or fiscal practices.

You can report suspected Medicare fraud in any of these ways:

- call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227);
- report online to the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) at <https://oig.hhs.gov/fraud/report-fraud>; or
- call the OIG at 1-800-HHS-TIPS (1-800-447-8477).

Many states have “duty to report” regulations, requiring physicians to report fraud related to state insurance programs. Be responsible and educate yourself about your state’s requirements. For issues related to state regulations, consider reporting your concerns to your state’s Office of the Attorney General.

If you have concerns about your liability or protections, seek professional legal counsel. Your malpractice carrier may be able to provide advice as well.

To read the Code of Ethics in full, visit aao.org/ethics-detail/code-of-ethics.

To submit a question, email ethics@aao.org.

OMIC: Volunteering for Vaccination Efforts?

Some ophthalmologists have expressed interest in contributing to the nationwide COVID-19 vaccination effort, either by volunteering to administer the vaccine in their communities or by making the vaccine available to their patients and staff. Vaccination services are complex and can be challenging for physicians who do not customarily vaccinate patients. Some challenges are logistical, and others can impact patient safety and increase physician liability exposure.

The Ophthalmic Mutual Insurance Company (OMIC) has been carefully monitoring this situation since the first COVID-19 vaccine was approved. Although the Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness (PREP) Act provides liability immunity, it is not unlimited. Vaccination services may still result in lawsuits or claims. OMIC is extending coverage to its insureds for the administration of COVID-19 vaccinations. Ask your risk management company about your liability and whether it provides coverage.

View OMIC’s risk management recommendations and consent form at www.omic.com/covid-19-vaccine-risk-management-considerations-and-consent.

OMIC offers professional liability insurance exclusively to Academy members, their employees, and their practices.

ACADEMY RESOURCES

Need Help Moving to EHR?

The Academy’s senior practice management consultants can ensure that your practice has a successful transition from paper to electronic health records (EHR), or from one EHR system to another. Schedule consultations with experienced and respected Academy experts for assistance with EHR and practice management system conversions and upgrades, including workflow

development and training.

Learn more at aao.org/consulting.

Improve Your Sleep for Better Overall Wellness

This month, the Academy wellness pages highlight tips and resources for better sleep. Quality sleep is necessary not only for your health and well-being, but also for your ability to perform on the job. An ongoing sleep deficit can raise your risk of chronic health problems and can affect your ability to think, react, and relate to others. A variety of factors may affect one’s ability to sleep well. The Academy will discuss a wide range of solutions for these issues throughout April.

Learn more about better sleep and other wellness tips at aao.org/wellness.

Access the Focal Points Digital Library for Free

Focal Points is now a free member benefit. The digital archive with 120+ clinical modules is accessible through the

Academy’s ONE Network. Each digital issue can help you apply research findings into your daily practice. The 2019 and 2020 modules also include audio files, so you can listen on your smartphone, tablet, or computer. Valuable topics include recent glaucoma treatments, retina-related research, and best practices for the use of optical

coherence tomography.

Review this member benefit at aao.org/focalpoints today.



MEETING MATTERS

Attend Mid-Year Forum 2021 Virtually

Mid-Year Forum is one of the Academy’s most significant yearly meetings, bringing the ophthalmology community together to discuss politics, policy, and practice management. This year’s meeting will be held virtually April 23 and 24 with two half-day sessions. Participation is open and free of charge to all Academy and AAOE members.



Keynote speaker.

Don't miss a conversation between Academy President Tamara R. Fountain, MD, and this year's keynote speaker, Nicholas A. Christakis, MD, PhD, MPH. Dr.

Dr. Christakis.

Christakis is a *New York Times* bestselling author. He will discuss his new book, *Apollo's Arrow: The Profound and Enduring Impact of Coronavirus on the Way We Live*.

Register for the 2021 Mid-Year Forum at aao.org/myf.

Attend the 2021 Ophthalmology Business Summit

Join business experts and Academy leaders for the 2021 Ophthalmology Business Summit (Live Online) on May 22.

The ophthalmic practice landscape is being reshaped by COVID-19 in ways that require new business thinking and enhanced leadership. Developed with program director Robert Melendez, MD, along with the American Academy of Ophthalmic Executives, the virtual four-hour summit will provide an engaging, highly interactive program for physician leaders and practice administrators that focuses on building a thriving and resilient practice. Physician leaders and practice administrators who attend as a team will realize the most benefit.

For more information, visit aao.org/business-summit.

Don't Miss the April 13 Abstract Deadline

Paper/poster and video abstracts for AAO 2021 are due by April 13. Lend your expertise to help shape the world's most comprehensive ophthalmology meeting.

For more information, visit aao.org/presentercentral.

AAO 2021: Program Preview

Russell N. Van Gelder, MD, PhD, will deliver the 78th Edward Jackson Memorial Lecture, titled "Molecular Diagnostics for Ocular Infectious Diseases," during the AAO 2021 Opening Session.

D.C. REPORT

Academy's Federal Agenda Driven by Fair Payment, Access to Care

The Academy's 2021 federal health policy agenda is guided by Academy principles and by concerns regarding sustainability of medical practices while continuing the delivery of high-quality accessible care.

Following are the Academy's top issues:

Medicare payment reform. The Academy will continue to advocate to prevent or soften any new 2022 payment cut with the expiration of the temporary 3.75% increase for 2021. The Academy will build on the major win in 2020 that mitigated the Medicare cuts for this year.

Payment boost for global surgical codes. The Academy will push to apply the evaluation and management (E/M) payment boost to the post-op visits in the global surgical codes.

Patient access to Medicare Part B drugs. The Academy will advocate to reverse CMS' decision to allow Medicare Advantage Plans to impose step therapy requirements and to reduce other obstacles to medically necessary Part B-covered drugs.

Fair reimbursement for Medicare Part B drugs. As the Biden administration considers reform of Part B drug payments, the Academy will work to preserve access for patients and ensure that physicians are kept whole and treated fairly.

Drug shortages and price spikes. The Academy will continue to seek opportunities under the current administration and Congress for solutions to address drug shortages and spiking Part D drug prices.

For the latest advocacy news, visit aao.org/advocacy.



Dr. Van Gelder

This session will take place the evening of Friday, Nov. 12, in the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center in New Orleans.

Dr. Van Gelder, a former president of the Academy, is a clinician-scientist

and teacher. He is the Boyd K. Bucey Memorial Chair, professor, and department chair in the University of Washington Medical School Department of Ophthalmology. His laboratory has been at the forefront of two fields, nonvisual photoreception and pathogen detection in uveitis.

He has acted as a reviewer and editorial board member for several publications—including *Ophthalmology*—and is also active in numerous other organizations and boards. He is a member of the NIH's Council of Councils, the National Advisory Eye Council, and the advisory committee

for the NEI Audacious Goals Initiative.

Watch for more news in the coming months at aao.org/2021. Full program information will be available June 16.

Registration and Hotel Reservations Coming Soon

Academy and AAOE members: Mark your calendar to register for AAO 2021 and reserve hotel rooms starting June 16. Registration and hotel reservations open July 7 for nonmembers.

Be alert! Fraudulent companies pretending to be associated with the Academy and AAO 2021 may appear in web searches or may contact you via email. These companies claim that they can book hotel rooms or register you for the Academy's annual meeting, but they are not affiliated with the Academy. Only book hotel rooms and registration through the Academy's website, aao.org/2021.

If you are ever in doubt, email meetings@aao.org or call 1-415-561-8500 to confirm before reserving a hotel room or registering.