



Deborah Davis | *COE MEMBER SPOTLIGHT*

Atwal Eye Care, New York

38 years in ophthalmology

Tell us about yourself and your current role:

I am the Chief Executive Officer of Atwal Eye Care and the Buffalo Ambulatory Surgery Center in Buffalo, New York. Atwal Eye Care is a comprehensive ophthalmology practice with 15 providers (MDs and ODs) and five locations throughout Western New York, including a vision correction center, optical shops, and a dedicated dry eye clinic.

We are a high-volume refractive and cataract surgery practice, with a fully equipped ambulatory surgery center (ASC) located on-site at our main office. Our team is committed to providing advanced, patient-centered care using the latest technology in vision correction and ophthalmic surgery.

What drew you to the specialty and the pathway to your role?

My late grandmother was legally blind for as long as I can remember. Watching her navigate daily challenges gave me a deep understanding of how much vision impacts every part of life. From a young age, I knew I wanted to work in healthcare, and her experience inspired me to focus on eyecare — a field where I could help others preserve and improve one of their most vital senses.

What inspired you to pursue the COE certification?

To me, the COE certification represents the gold standard in eyecare administration. It was one of the accomplishments I wanted most, worked the hardest to achieve, and continue to value deeply. Earning it reinforced my commitment to excellence, leadership, and the highest standards of practice management in ophthalmology.

How did you prepare for the exam or training process (study methods, resources, mentors)?

I earned my COE certification early in my career, within the first few years it was offered, at a time when there were very few study resources available. I relied heavily on the reference books recommended by the ASOA as my primary study materials and sought guidance from colleagues who had already taken the exam. The process required focus, discipline, and persistence, but it proved to be an invaluable learning experience that helped shape my foundation in eyecare administration.

What was the most challenging part of preparing for the exam?

I found the most challenging part of preparing for the COE exam was finding the time to study. I had to be very disciplined about setting aside dedicated time to prepare while still managing my professional responsibilities and commitments at home. Balancing it all required focus and organization, but the effort was well worth it.

What advice would you offer to those considering sitting for the exam?

For those considering taking the COE exam, I would recommend utilizing all of the excellent study materials and resources that ASOA offers, and connecting with current COEs for guidance and support. Their insights and experiences can be incredibly valuable as you prepare — and will remind you that you're part of a strong, knowledgeable community within eyecare administration.

How has achieving this certification impacted your professional development?

Receiving this certification had a profound impact on my professional development. It made me feel recognized as a respected leader in ophthalmology administration and inspired me to speak at conferences, serve as the ASOA President and as the current NBCOE President, and volunteer within the eyecare community.

In what ways will this certification benefit your team, patients/clients, or the organization?

Being recognized in my field with this designation is incredibly inspiring, and it reinforces my commitment to leadership, excellence, and providing the highest level of care. This designation is not only a personal milestone — it benefits my team and our patients by reinforcing a culture of excellence and leadership.

What motivates you to continue pursuing learning and professional development?

Ultimately, I believe that continual learning is essential — if you're not growing, what are you doing? My team and our patients are what inspire me to keep pursuing professional development and striving for excellence in every aspect of my work. Earning the COE reinforced my commitment to leadership, lifelong learning, and delivering the highest level of care in eyecare administration.

How did you celebrate after earning your certification?

I received my COE certification letter in the mail many years ago, and if memory serves, it was about a 4–6 week wait after taking the exam. I remember it vividly — walking to the mailbox, seeing the envelope, and feeling shaky and nervous, afraid to open it, knowing how devastated I would be if I hadn't earned the designation.

You can imagine my elation and relief when I opened the letter and saw that I had passed the exam and officially earned my COE! It was truly one of the proudest professional days of my life, a moment that affirmed the hard work, dedication, and perseverance I had invested in my career and in eyecare administration.

Who supported or inspired you most along this journey?

I have been extremely fortunate to work for the same organization throughout my entire ophthalmic career. They have been incredibly supportive of me and my journey to earn my COE certification. Equally, my family has been a tremendous source of support, encouraging me every step of the way. Their belief in me has made pursuing professional growth and achieving this milestone all the more meaningful.

Outside of work and professional learning, what do you enjoy doing in your free time?

Outside of work, I enjoy reading immensely and am an active member of two book clubs, which I find both stimulating and rewarding. I also love traveling, exploring new places and cultures, and practicing yoga, which helps me stay centered and balanced in both my personal and professional life. Additionally, I have a passion for party planning and decorating, which allows me to express my creativity and bring joy to friends and family.

What is next on your professional development journey?

I am honored to serve as the current NBCOE President and look forward to passing the torch to the incoming President, Tina Allen. I will continue to contribute to ASOA as a volunteer and speaker, sharing my experience and supporting the growth of future leaders in eyecare administration.

Is this the year you obtain your COE? Visit <https://www.asoa.org/career-and-advancement/certified-ophthalmic-executive> for more information and to get started!