



Shelley Averette | *COE MEMBER SPOTLIGHT*

Raleigh Ophthalmology, NC

31 years in ophthalmology

Tell us about yourself and your current role:

I am the Practice Administrator at Raleigh Ophthalmology in Raleigh, NC. We are a multispecialty practice with 12 physicians and 4 locations. Raleigh Ophthalmology is an affiliate of Eye South Partners in Atlanta, GA.

I started my career as an Ophthalmic Technician and am a COT, as well as a COE.

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

After college, I worked in a research lab and quickly learned I was more of a "people person" than I thought. I responded to an advertisement in the newspaper for an Ophthalmic Technician, and found that it checked all my boxes for a career path- helping people, learning something new daily, and more!

In the 31 years I have spent in Ophthalmology, I have been lucky to work in an Ambulatory Surgical Center assisting in multispecialty surgeries including vitreoretinal, cataract, cornea, and glaucoma, and see the technologies advance in diagnostic testing to help our patients so much earlier!

Over the years I was a Clinical Lead, then Clinical Manager, and now the Practice Administrator, overseeing all operations of our practice. I still am a Certified Ophthalmic Technician and Certified Ophthalmic Executive.

What inspired you to pursue the COE certification?

Raleigh Ophthalmology's previous practice administrator, Evelyn Kelly, was a huge believer in training your successor. She had been exposing me to projects outside of my tasks as a Clinical Manager, and preparing me for the role of Practice Administrator for several years. As a goal during an annual performance evaluation, she recommended that I start participating in the ASOA Administrator's Beginner Circle, and consider the COE.

For me, preparing for the COE test was helpful to learn about the areas I was not actively involved in as a Clinical Manager. It helped me learn more about finance, metrics, budgets, and other regulatory areas that I did not have significant knowledge. In addition, it was the "proof" I needed for our physicians to show that I was committed to the career path to Practice Administrator, when our leader was ready for retirement.

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

Fortunately, my practice paid for a Premium membership with ASOA so I had access to all of ASOA's online learning. In addition, resources provided by the ASOA and BSM modules for practice management were also very helpful. Our previous practice administrator also gifted me with a set of COE flash cards which I used to study and guide my research to specific topics or knowledge domains.

Previously attended meetings for coding/billing provided resources for studying in this area. It was also great to network with others who have previously taken the test, particularly those coming from a clinical background, and know what areas they struggled with or resources that were helpful to them.

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

Finding time after a very busy clinic day to devote to study was the most challenging part of preparing for the exam. Adding more knowledge to my skillset proved beneficial even in my role of Clinical Manager at the time, providing more insight about complex decision making based on metrics and financial data. The additional knowledge I was learning was immediately beneficial.

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

Just keep learning! Network with others from a similar background to see what they used to prepare for the exam. Participate in webinars or programs from ASOA, so you are exposed to the topics that will be tested. Don't assume that the resources and flash cards provide all the information needed to be successful for the exam. Dig deeper into these knowledge areas so you have full understanding and can apply this information to practical scenarios.

How has achieving this certification impacted your professional development?

Gaining the COE as a Clinical Manager was the demonstration to our physicians that I was committed to professional development and interested in advancement in our practice, when the time was right! After achieving certification in 2022, I transitioned from the Clinical Manager to Practice Administrator at Raleigh Ophthalmology in 2023.

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

The COE demonstrates that I am committed to my role as Practice Administrator. It shows my dedication to ongoing learning in the area of Practice Management. The support of the ASOA, as a COE, provides ongoing learning, networking, resources, new opportunities, access to vendors, and gaining pearls of wisdom from others. This directly contributes to improving training and resources for our employees, improves processes that lend to excellent patient care and supports the success of our physicians in providing care to our patients.

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!

What motivates you to continue pursuing learning and professional development?

I often tell our managers that I will retire when I stop learning. Ongoing learning has been important to me throughout my career, and I continue to learn something new daily. There is always room for more knowledge or room for improvement in all we do! And, I am nowhere close to retirement!

Ongoing learning and professional development helps me to be the best I can be in my role, but also helps me be a mentor to those also seeking additional learning and development. This is an important part of our practice culture!

How did you celebrate after earning your certification?

My family and Practice Administrator were the first people I reached out to with the great news!

Who supported or inspired you most along this journey?

Evelyn Kelly, our previous administrator, certainly was my biggest cheerleader for the COE journey. She identified something in me, that I am not sure I would've seen in myself- I definitely thank her for guiding me down this path.

Our Managing Partner and other physicians also celebrated this achievement continuing to encourage and provide additional learning and opportunities for involvement in the practice.

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

Outside of work, I enjoy gardening, and then canning and freezing my summer produce, so we can enjoy all year long. I also enjoy singing in a choir and small ensemble. My husband and I are also now traveling to Chicago, as our only child moved there last year- we have enjoyed visiting him and exploring a new city!

What is next on your professional development journey?

As a practice administrator in a corporate model, I am enjoying learning more about being an administrator in a private equity platform. Eye South supports ongoing professional development of people leaders with leadership training, exposure to corporate departments and processes, committees to participate on, and more. I am also excited about being a part of the NBCOE and helping to promote the COE with ASOA!