



PRESIDENT
Carol L. Scott, OD, FCOVD
1426 East Bradford Parkway
Springfield, MO 65804

PRESIDENT-ELECT
Bradley E. Habermehl, OD, FCOVD
4091 Richfield Road
Flint, MI 48506

VICE PRESIDENT
Carole L. Hong, OD, FCOVD
1234 Cherry Street
San Carlos, CA 94070

SECRETARY-TREASURER
Robert S. Byne, OD, FCOVD
572 Route 6
Mahopac, NY 10541

IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT
Dan L. Fortenbacher, OD, FCOVD
2908 Division Street
Saint Joseph, MI 49085

DIRECTORS

Paul R. Bernstein, OD, FCOVD
701 Westchester Ave
White Plains, NY 10604

David A. Damari, OD, FCOVD
Southern College of Optometry
1245 Madison Ave.
Memphis, TN 38104

Kathleen Kinney, OD, FCOVD
1511 3rd Avenue, Suite 411
Seattle, WA 98101

Kara Heying, OD, FCOVD
Cedar Rapids Eyecare
4207 Glass Road NE
Cedar Rapids, IA 52402

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Pamela R. Happ, CAE
215 West Garfield Rd., Suite 200
Aurora, OH 44202

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To Our AOA Colleagues:

The College of Optometrists in Vision Development (COVD) is an international organization established in 1970 for the primary purpose of conducting Board Certification through our International Examination and Certification Board (IECB). Over 90% of COVD's members are American optometrists and the majority are also members of AOA.

When the Joint Board Certification Project Team (JBCPT) was formed, COVD was intrigued by the prospect that the effort to board certify optometrists with advanced competency in a specialty area of our profession, begun so long ago by our organization, might be expanded. In February 2008, representatives of COVD met with the JBCPT to express our interest and offer assistance in the process of developing a model for board certification for all optometrists. We made a presentation about our fellowship certification process: a series of open book questions scored by reviewers; a 100 item multiple choice examination constructed with input from NBEO consultants; an oral interview; and maintenance of certification components. Given our decades of experience in certifying optometrists as having advanced competence in the optometric specialty of vision development and therapy, it is readily apparent that COVD has much to offer in developing a credible, defensible board certification process that provides value to those who choose to become certified. The COVD certification process has undergone review by third party payers, state boards, and even in the courthouse. In every instance, this model of board certification within optometry has been validated.

In light of this wide-ranging acceptance of the COVD model of board certification, it is surprising to the members of our organization that COVD did not have representation on the JBCPT or in the proposed structure of the American Board of Optometry and that Fellowship in COVD has not been proposed to have any value toward "board certification" in the JBCPT model.

Given our mission and our history, COVD clearly understands the value of board certification of specialties within a profession. We also understand the need for a credible assessment of the maintenance of practitioner competence in a health care science that is continually developing and improving. However, we would suggest that these two processes should be separately considered, and should not be confused, if we are to maintain and improve

the credibility of our extraordinary profession to the general public and to organizations that have always looked for ways to challenge our viability. We believe that nothing less than the future of optometry as an independent health care profession is at stake in this discussion. One only has to look at two other profession's experiences to understand this: the decline in the numbers of podiatry students after they required residencies to validate their board certification process, and the paucity of quality applicants for residencies in family practice as most medical students recognize that they were attempting to convert a general medical practice into a "specialty" to improve public perception. These problems continue to this day for podiatry¹ and family practice².

In light of the difficulties the JBCPT model may create by causing confusion between maintenance of competence credentialing and board certification as those terms are broadly understood throughout the healthcare community, and failure to include the most successful board certification program in optometry to date in its process, we suggest that it is premature to approve the current model. We are confident that continuing the current discussion over the ensuing months, and involving interested parties will help create a viable model that unifies rather than fragments our profession

Sincerely,

Carol Scott, OD, FCOVD
COVD President

1. Center for Health Workforce Studies, School of Public Health, University at Albany. Podiatric Medicine Workforce Study. Dec 2007 (accessed on 13 May 09 at <http://www.apma.org/MainMenu/Careers/2007-Podiatric-Medicine-Workforce-Report.aspx>)
2. Jolly, P. Charting Outcomes in the Match: Characteristics of applicants who matched to their preferred specialty in the 2005 NRMP main residency match. Assoc of Amer Med Colleges, July 2006.