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From: Sue A. Weingartner [sweingartner@rmsmanagement.com]
Sent: Tuesday, April 14, 2009 5:26 PM
To: MOA AA List Serve
Subject: Protecting Optometry's Future (Message from Dr. David Cockrell, AOA Trustee)



Dear AOA Member:

As I meet with my colleagues throughout the United States, the topic of board certification is foremost on most ODs' minds. For me, the questions and concerns led me down the path of information gathering that I have taken in the past several months.

I wondered whether optometry really needed to be worried about changes in health care. After all, we've seen our share of the eye care market increase. Outsiders – such as U.S. News and World Report – view our profession as a very desirable one. Even the most stubborn state and federal legislators are grasping our message.



David Cockrell, O.D.

I then learned that the most recent Medicare demonstration project – called Medical Home – only accepts "board-certified" physicians (and remember we are not). And, Optometry is not specifically named a participant in the program. I started to see the writing on the wall. We have seen the increase in federal initiatives for health care reform like PQRI and P4P in the past few years. We see increased attention to health care policy changes in the White House and the federal government. Change is happening.

Just two weeks ago, while providing testimony for scope expansion legislation in South Carolina, I encountered something new to me. In their testimony, several of the MDs opposing Optometry's position referenced the fact that Optometry does not have a board certification process. It wasn't too long ago that our profession fought to use the word "physician" in Medicare. Now, it appears to me that some would seek to use yet another point (in this case, the phrase "board certification") to deny our place in health care. Change is happening **now**.

"Board certification" is shaping up to be the next barrier in our unending fight for access. The lack of it is certainly being used against us now in scope advancement efforts. As practitioners, veterans of many legislative battles *and* members of the AOA Board, we have asked ourselves, "What can we do to ensure ODs are able to overcome that barrier?"

As an AOA Board member and a private practitioner, I don't want to delay a decision simply because it is difficult to reach consensus on the issue, and then face my colleagues in the near future and have to answer, "Why didn't you try to protect our profession on this issue when we had the chance?"

As I've studied this issue, met the policymakers who make decisions that affect us, and discussed coming challenges with our colleagues from all the health care professions, I've become convinced a model such as the one proposed by the Joint Board Certification Project Team is the best next step for Optometry.

To help you learn more, we've assembled [Health Care Reform, Board Certification, and Optometry's Next Step to Protect Our Future: Part One in a Series of Policy Briefings for AOA Members](#). It is the first in a series, summarizing what we know, and why we believe Optometry can best prepare itself for the future by moving toward a credible, defensible process of board certification. I hope you will take the time to review it, start your own course of study on the subject, and evaluate the options for our profession, now and in the future. To keep current on the latest news about health care reform, and AOA's response, visit <http://certification.aoa.org>, or email me at david@aoa.org.

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