





# MAKING THE CASE FOR SCRIBE CERTIFICATION

Ophthalmic practices scored a big win this winter when CMS confirmed that ophthalmic scribes could enter Computerized Physician Order Entry (CPOE) data into Electronic Health Record (EHR) systems for the purposes of attesting to Stage 2 Meaningful Use.

Based on an FAQ brief that was issued by CMS after the Meaningful Use Stage 2 2012 Final Rule was released, ASCRS and ASOA always took the position that certified ophthalmic scribes were able to enter CPOE. After conflicting information was released in 2014 regarding whether ophthalmic scribes could or could not in fact enter this data, ASCRS/ASOA engaged in numerous conversations with CMS to resolve the issue.

As a result of these efforts, CMS recently stated that ophthalmic-certified scribes will qualify to enter CPOE data for Meaningful Use. One group offering scribe certification is the American College of Medical Scribe Specialists (ACMSS), which has designed an ophthalmology-specific scribe certification program.

#### WEIGHING THE BENEFITS

The decision to become certified is both professional and personal. For many practices, the decision to request (or require) scribe certification of non-certified employees can enhance the professional environment of the clinical team while offering non-certified employees professional growth opportunities. Although most practices have technician training programs in place that include requiring technicians to achieve the certified ophthalmic assistant (COA) designation, prior to the scribe certification program there was no credible opportunity to ensure equivalent certification for the scribe team. For those practices utilizing certified technicians in a scribe capacity, the additional certification provides yet another layer of qualification and professional growth for these clinical professionals. Certified technicians should consider acquiring this certification in addition to their existing COA certification.

For clinical staff, the scribe certification designation can provide a great sense of achievement in a more obtainable format than a traditional COA or undergraduate educational program could provide. Similar to certification status for ancillary professionals such as certified medical assistants or LPNs, this new designation can increase the marketability of these professionals while improving self-esteem and their overall sense of accomplishment.

#### TAKING THE PULSE AT OUR PRACTICE

Our practice is young. We opened in the spring of 2008 and have grown to a four-provider practice that provides

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specialty services to patients. Sixty percent of our staff is under 30 years of age, all of our technicians are certified ophthalmic assistants, and our staff subscribes to the practice philosophy of providing quality patient care in an efficient and friendly environment.

When presented with the option of offering scribe certification to staff, the decision for our practice was a no-brainer. Although our practice requires COA certification for technicians, a similar requirement was not previously placed on the scribe function within the office. I reached out to both our surgeons and our certified scribes and asked them for their viewpoint as to the value of the scribe certification designation.

One of our surgeons, Kristiana Neff, MD, agrees that “because the patient chart is a legal document, accuracy is critical for every part of medicine, from patient care to reimbursement. Ultimately, this means making this document as perfect as possible should remain one of the highest priorities. With EMR taking more time away from the actual practice of medicine, having an educated and properly trained scribe is paramount to ensure that [the doctor’s] thoughts are properly transcribed and executed, so that their precious time can be used to practice medicine instead of staring at a computer screen. This means educating and certifying this ancillary team member as you would a valued technician.”

Our staff agrees. Amanda Utsey, COA, CMSS, believes that “a scribe’s full concentration on creating a complete chart results in improved patient compliance and more accurate coding while allowing the doctors more face-to-face interaction with patients.”



### INVESTING IN EMPLOYEES

As an administrator, our role is to create practice efficiencies, but also to protect the needs of our patients, providers, and employees. The debate on whether certification status is important to a practice is fairly moot. Practices that do not invest in their employees through certification programs such as the COA, scribe certification, and COE for administrators and managers are missing opportunities to enhance the ophthalmic industry and further validate the benefits to training and education for these clinical professionals. The fact that this designation now also meets the Meaningful Use criteria is the added bonus. *AE*



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