PROTOCOL FOR OSTEOPATHIC CONTINUOUS CERTIFICATION (OCC)

The objectives and purposes of the American Osteopathic Board of Ophthalmology and Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery (AOBOO-HNS) are:

1. To define and determine the qualifications required of osteopathic physicians for certification and OCC in the specialty(s) of ophthalmology, otolaryngology/facial plastic surgery and any other specialty and/or certification of added qualifications which may be assigned to the jurisdiction of the Board by the Board of Trustees of the American Osteopathic Association (AOA).

2. To determine the standards of education, formal training and practice required for certification and OCC in the specialty(s) of ophthalmology, otolaryngology/facial plastic surgery and any other specialty and/or certification of added qualifications which may be assigned to the jurisdiction of the Board.

3. To establish procedures for the conduct of examination at least once a year for primary certification. OCC written examinations for primary certification and certification of added qualifications will be made available twice annually.

4. To provide and issue certificates for certification in all specialty(s) assigned to the Board.

5. To recommend to the Bureau of Osteopathic Specialists (BOS) the revocation of certificates for cause.

6. To use every means possible to maintain a high standard of practice within the osteopathic profession.

SPECIALTY DEFINED

For the purpose of the operation of the Board, the following divisions of practice are defined:

1. The practice of ophthalmology shall consist of the diagnosis and treatment of the disorders and diseases of the eye and its adnexia, including refraction.

2. The practice of otolaryngology shall include the diagnosis and treatment of disorders and diseases of the ear, nose and throat, and otolaryngic allergy, and may include such other subspecialties as have a definite relationship to otolaryngology.

3. The practice of otolaryngology/facial plastic surgery shall include the diagnosis and treatment of disorders and diseases of the ear, nose and throat, and otolaryngic allergy, as well as the medical and surgical fields of facial plastic surgery.

WHAT IS OCC?

Osteopathic Continuous Certification (OCC) is the process by which board-certified DOs will maintain current status and demonstrate competency in their specialty area. The goals for OCC are to provide certified physicians and surgeons with a process by which they can continually assess and improve their skills and to assure patients and the public that certified physicians and surgeons are being assessed through reliable and valid measures.

OCC PROCESS

The OCC process will be composed of five (5) documentation components, described in detail below:

1. Unrestricted state/jurisdictional military licensure
2. Lifelong learning (continuing medical education)
3. Cognitive assessment (written examination)
4: Practice performance assessment (clinical assessment, self-evaluation and demonstration of practice improvement)
5: Continuous (uninterrupted) AOA Membership

The OCC process will be required to be completed over a ten (10) year cycle and will be repeated every ten (10) years, beginning January 1, 2013.

Who is required to participate in OCC? All diplomates with time-limited certification will be required to participate in OCC.

How may I meet the OCC requirements if I am not providing patient care? Diplomates with time-limited certification, who are in an academic or administrative position and who are not clinically caring for patients, may request a clinically inactive status which allows diplomates to propose Component 4 activities that are applicable to their current role in osteopathic medicine. The Board must review and approve proposed Component 4 activities. All other OCC components must be satisfied, including the examination. The clinically inactive status applies to unemployed physicians and academic physicians who do not supervise residents providing patient care.

Should the diplomate decide to return to practice (part-time or full-time), he or she must submit proof of 25 hours of 1A CME in the specialty in the first year and take the written examination at the first available administration.

Will I remain certified if I don't participate in OCC? By choosing not to participate in OCC, you are voluntarily suspending the rights to your board certification as mandated by the American Osteopathic Association and Bureau of Osteopathic Specialists.

Who has the option of participating? If you have a non-time-limited certification, participation in OCC is voluntary at this time; however, the AOBBOO-HNS strongly encourages your participation. The Federation of State Medical Boards (FSMB) has agreed to accept OCC for Maintenance of Licensure (MOL). If you do not participate in OCC, you may have additional requirements for MOL as prescribed by the state(s) where you are licensed. If a diplomate with a non-time-dated certification is required by a state licensing board or an outside entity (i.e., insurance provider) to participate in MOL/OCC, the diplomate will be required to complete all components of the OCC process.

Diplomates with non-time-limited certificates will still be required to maintain their license to practice and to maintain AOA membership, which also includes meeting all CME requirements as outlined by the AOA.

Diplomates who have a non-time-limited primary specialty certification and time-limited CAQ(s) must fully participate in the OCC process for the specialty area of the CAQ in order to maintain the CAQ and be deemed complaint with OCC. The OCC process remains voluntary for the primary specialty certification.

APPLICATION FOR OCC
An official OCC application will be required from each diplomate at the beginning of each OCC cycle. The application is required to ensure that the AOBBOO-HNS has the most current contact information for the diplomate. The OCC application will be available on the AOBBOO-HNS website at www.aoboo.org.

All OCC application and documentation materials will remain on file with and shall remain the property of the AOBBOO-HNS.

How do I start OCC for my specialty? Official letters of announcement will be sent to all diplomates who are required to participate in OCC, with a registration deadline of April 30, 2013 for primary specialties and April 30, 2014 for CAQs. The AOBBOO-HNS will provide an OCC registration process for all diplomates with a time-limited certificate, as well as those diplomates with a non-time-limited certificate who wish to participate voluntarily.

How can I track my progress regarding the continuous certification requirements? Please visit https://physicianportal.osteopathic.org to track your OCC requirements.

Fellowship Exemption: AOA board-certified physicians who begin fellowship training are exempt from participation in OCC during the training period only.

OCC FEES
Each diplomate will be required to pay an annual OCC fee of $150.00. Verification and compliance with the OCC process will be available through the Board Office upon written request from the diplomate.
**OCC COMPONENTS**

## Component 1: Unrestricted State/Jurisdictional Military Licensure

Each diplomate will be required to maintain a valid and unrestricted state license to practice medicine in one of the 50 states or Canada, or a valid and unrestricted jurisdictional military license. In addition, diplomates are required to adhere to the AOA Code of Ethics. The AOBOO-HNS will require that the diplomate provide proof of valid and unrestricted license annually. The AOBOO-HNS will conduct at least once every other year random verifications of 25% of the diplomates in the OCC process. If, at the time of licensure verification, a diplomate has a restricted license as defined by the AOA, the diplomate must submit an update every six (6) months until the restriction has been lifted.

### What happens to my AOA board certification if I have a restricted license?

The Certification Compliance Review (CCR) Committee, a sub-committee of the AOA Bureau of Osteopathic Specialists (BOS), has been formed. The CCR will review all OCC files with license restrictions and monitor these suspensions on a case-by-case basis with the input of the individual certifying board.

## Component 2: Lifelong Learning

During each three (3) year continuing medical education (CME) cycle, each diplomate must fulfill the AOA-required 120 hours, 30 hours of which must be Category 1A, and 50 hours of which must be Category 1 or 2 primary specialty credit hours as defined by the AOBOO-HNS. Diplomates holding one or more certificates of added qualifications (CAQs) must earn a minimum of 13 specialty credits in each subspecialty area of certification.

A list of AOBOO-HNS-approved specialty courses will be posted on the Board website at [www.aoboo.org](http://www.aoboo.org). The AOBOO-HNS strongly recommends that each diplomate attend at least one (1) AOOCO-HNS Annual Clinical Assembly in every three (3) year CME period. The AOBOO-HNS will require that the diplomate submit a copy of the AOA CME report at least once during every three (3) year CME cycle. Diplomates who do not fulfill the CME requirements as outlined above will be required to submit in writing a corrective action plan, and they will be expected to fulfill the requirement within the first five (5) months of the next CME cycle as described in the AOA CME Guide.

## Component 3: Cognitive Assessment

Each diplomate will be required to take and pass a written examination before the expiration of the time-limited certificate. Components 1 and 5 must be verified prior to taking an examination.

### When will the examinations be offered?

The written examinations will be offered twice a year (spring and fall). Diplomates may begin taking the examination three (3) years prior to the expiration date of their certification, allowing six (6) opportunities to pass the examination.

### Eligibility example:

A diplomate whose original certificate issued in May 2005 and expires in May 2015 will be eligible for the written examination beginning with the spring of 2012 and ending with the fall of 2014.

If the diplomate passes the written examination in a year prior to the year in which the certificate expires, the passing grade will be held and reported to the AOA in the year of expiration, thus maintaining the 10-year time period of certification. The new certificate will be valid for ten (10) years from the date of the expiring certificate.

Upon failure of the OCC written examination, and subsequent expiration of the diplomate’s certification, the AOA will be notified, and the certification will be inactivated.

### OCC Reentry Process:

Diplomates whose time-limited certification has been deemed inactive for any reason may petition the AOA BOS Certification Compliance Review (CCR) Committee to reactivate the certification. This process also applies to non-clinical and academic physicians reentering clinical practice and to former non-time-limited certificate holders who did not maintain their board certification as required.

1. Physicians reentering the certification process within three (3) years of the expiration of inactivation of their certification may reenter the process by remediating or satisfying any outstanding OCC requirements not fulfilled when the certification became inactive. The date of certification will be effective on the date that all requirements have been satisfied and valid for ten (10) years.

2. Physicians wishing to reenter the certification process more than three (3) years following the expiration or inactivation of their certification must take the Component 3 cognitive assessment examination at the next available administration and immediately begin the OCC process through participation in a Component 4 activity. Additional remedial activities such as training or continuing medical education may also be required.
**Component 4: Quality Improvement Activity**
Each diplomate will be required to attest to participating in a Quality Improvement Activity. The attestation form is available on the AOA physician portal. The direct link to the attestation form is https://physicianportal.osteopathic.org/PPA.

If you have not participated in a quality improvement activity you will be asked to complete 2 practice performance assessment (PPA) by visiting www.osteopathic-cat.com. Please note, there is a $295 fee associated with a subscription to www.osteopathic-cat.com.

**Component 5: Continuous AOA Membership**
Each diplomate will be required to maintain continuous and uninterrupted membership in the American Osteopathic Association (AOA) or the Canadian Osteopathic Association and to pay all applicable fees. The AOBBO-HNS will annually conduct random verifications of 50% of the diplomates in the OCC process. If, at the time of verification, a diplomate has allowed his or her AOA membership to lapse, he/she will not be permitted to proceed in the OCC process.

**What if I miss a step and don't complete all of the requirements by the deadlines?** The objective of the AOBBO-HNS is to stay in contact with all diplomates while they are in the OCC process, with the expectation that no one will miss a step. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of each diplomate in the OCC process to stay informed and up to date with all of the OCC requirements (see OCC Reentry Process on Pages 3 and 4).

**WRITTEN EXAMINATION PROCESS**
Each diplomate must submit an OCC written examination application, accompanied by a letter of intent and the $2,000.00 examination fee, by March 1 for the spring examination or by August 1 for the fall examination.

On the day of the examination, the diplomate must register and show proper photo ID. The diplomate will receive an envelope containing an exam ID number, file update form and any other applicable information and instructions. The diplomate must place only this exam ID number on the examination score sheets and test booklet cover. The file update form is to be filled out and returned to the examination staff. The examination answer sheet(s) will be provided by the Board to a psychometric consultant for grading. On the day of the examination, NONE of the following items will be allowed in the examination area: cell phones, PDAs or other electronic devices, printed material relating to examination questions, hand bags, brief cases, backpacks or suitcases. The examination staff will not be responsible for storage of examinees' personal property. Violation of this requirement may result in termination of the examination.

In accordance with the AOA Bureau of Osteopathic Specialists Standards Review Committee, the written examination is reviewed by a psychometrician who finds the examination process to be psychometrically sound and defensible and who follows the rules of practice established in the APA/AERA National Standards for Education and Psychological Testing. Pass and fail decisions are based solely on the content mastery displayed by the diplomate.

**EXAMINATION GRADES**
All examination records shall be submitted by the chairman of the Examination Committee to the Board, and the entire Board shall determine the final results of the written examination.

The Board sets passing standards for the written examination, using an acceptable measurement model known as "criterion-referenced standard setting." Following this model, the Board specifies the particular content and level of content difficulty necessary for an examinee to be considered a passing diplomate. Board members, who are themselves all certified, come from both practice and academic settings. The standard represents the minimal knowledge specified to be considered a certified surgeon.

All examination results are reviewed and approved by the entire Board. Diplomates will be notified no later than 60 days following the Board’s decision. Diplomates failing the written examination will subsequently receive a deficiency report.

**APPEAL MECHANISM**
If the diplomate believes that the action of the Board constitutes unequal application of regulations and requirements or standards, unwarranted discrimination, prejudice, unfairness or improper conduct of all or any part of an examination conducted by the Board, the diplomate has the right to appeal to the Appeal Committee of the Board.
CERTIFICATES
Certificates are issued by the Board to diplomats who have met all requirements of board certification and OCC and who have been reviewed and approved by the AOA Bureau of Osteopathic Specialists.

REVOCATION AND REINSTATEMENT
Immediately following official notification that a diplomat no longer meets any one of the OCC component requirements, the AOA will be notified, and the certificate will be inactivated according to procedures developed by the AOA Bureau of Osteopathic Specialists.

OCC Reentry Process: For diplomats whose time-limited certification has been deemed inactive for any reason may petition the AOA BOS Certification Compliance Review (CCR) Committee to reactivate the certification. This process also applies to non-clinical and academic physicians reentering clinical practice and to former non-time-limited certificate holders who did not maintain their board certification as required.
1. Physicians reentering the certification process within three (3) years of the expiration of inactivation of their certification may reenter the process by remediating or satisfying any outstanding OCC requirements not fulfilled when the certification became inactive. The date of certification will be effective on the date that all requirements have been satisfied and valid for ten (10) years.

2. Physicians wishing to reenter the certification process three (3) years or more following the expiration or inactivation of their certification must take the Component 3 cognitive assessment at the next available administration and immediately begin the OCC process through participation in a Component 4 activity. Additional remedial activities such as training or continuing medical education may also be required.

APPENDIX A

Upon completion of the official OCC registration process, each diplomate agrees:

- To disqualification from examination and forfeiture of fee or from issuance of a certification of specialization or to the surrender of such certificate of specialization as directed by the American Osteopathic Association (AOA) in the event that any foregoing statements made by the diplomate are false, or in the event that any of the rules, regulations and requirements governing such examinations are violated, or in the event that the diplomate does not comply with any of the Bylaws and Rules and Regulations of the American Osteopathic Board of Ophthalmology and Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery (AOBOO-HNS).
- To hold the AOA, the AOBOO-HNS, its members, examiners, officers and agents free from any damages, expense or complaint by reason of any action they or any one of them may take in connection with the application, or the failure of the AOBOO-HNS to recommend issuance of such certification of specialization, or the revocation of any certificate of specialization issued pursuant to the application.
- To abide by the Code of Ethics of the AOA, which has been formulated to guide its member physicians and surgeons in their professional lives. The standards presented are designed to address the osteopathic physician’s and surgeon’s ethical and professional responsibilities to patients, to society, to the AOA, to others involved in healthcare and to the diplomate. The AOA has adopted the position that physicians and surgeons should play a major role in the development and instruction of medical ethics.
- To pledge that, if recommended by the AOBOO-HNS and if certified by the AOA, that the Constitution and Bylaws of the AOA will be upheld, and further pledge that if any violation of ethical conduct occurs, particularly as it relates to hospital procedure or surgical practices, this shall be deemed cause for revocation of certification by the AOBOO-HNS and by the AOA.

APPENDIX B

Americans with Disabilities Act and Special Testing Accommodations

The American Osteopathic Board of Ophthalmology and Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery is committed to a policy of compliance with federal, state and local laws and regulations. The AOBOO-HNS, in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Acts (ADA), has adopted the following policy. Physicians who are eligible for examination may submit an application for accommodation of a disability by using an application form approved by the Board.

Definition of Disability

Under the ADA, a disability is defined as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of the individual. An individual is not substantially limited in a major life activity if the limitation does not amount to a significant restriction when compared with the abilities of the average person.

Policy Statement

All qualified diplomats for board certification who suffer from a disability as defined in the ADA may apply to a certifying board for accommodation of that disability. The AOBOO-HNS shall have the discretionary authority, subject to review by the BOS Appeals Committee and the AOA Board of Trustees, to determine if an accommodation is appropriate.

Procedure for Applying for Accommodation of Disability

1. Requests for accommodation of a disability must be submitted in writing to the AOBOO-HNS at least ninety (90) days prior to the examination date. The request must be supported by appropriate documentation of the diagnosis of disability and the need for accommodation, including the evaluation of the diplomate by a qualified professional (see Documentation Requirements).
2. Requests for accommodation must be complete and submitted on time. The AOBOO-HNS will not delay scheduled administrations of examinations due to a diplomate’s failure to submit a complete application.
3. The AOBOO-HNS must complete its review of requests for accommodation in a timely fashion and advise the diplomate within thirty (30) days of its receipt of a request for accommodation: (a) the requested accommodation will be granted, (b) the requested accommodation will be granted in part; (c) additional information is required; or (d) the requested accommodation will be denied.
4. The AOBOO-HNS may request additional information, including requiring an applicant to secure a second opinion from an outside expert or submitting the applicant’s documentation to an outside expert. The cost of review by an outside expert will be paid by the AOBOO-HNS.
5. In general, reapplication for special accommodation is not required for each examination administration. However, applicants seeking accommodation of a new disability or a different accommodation of the same disability must submit new applications.

Documentation Requirements

Requirements for accommodation must be supported by appropriate documentation of the disability and the need for the requested accommodation. At a minimum, the application should provide the following information and documentation, which shall be prepared and furnished at the applicant’s expense:

- Identification of the disability
- Identification of the requested accommodation(s) for each identified disability
- The name and current contact information (address, telephone number, email address) of each professional providing a report(s) in support of the disability and/or requested accommodation
- A verification and authorization form signed by the certification diplomate.
- An education and examination history, including the following information: (a) the name, location and dates of attendance for all schools the diplomate attended from elementary school to the present, (b) identify the schools which provided accommodations for the disability in examination settings and the nature of accommodations made for the disability, (c) identify standardized tests completed in the course of the diplomate’s education (e.g., ACT, SAT, MCAT, COMLEX/NBOME); (d) for each test identified, diplomate is to indicate whether he/she received an accommodation for the stated disability and to identify the nature of the accommodation; (e) if the diplomate sought an accommodation that was denied, please explain the circumstances involved. If the diplomate has never received an accommodation, please provide a detailed explanation as part of the neuropsychological evaluation discussed below concerning the reasons no
accommodation was given in the past and the reason one is needed now.

- **For diplomats seeking accommodation of a learning disability, a comprehensive neuropsychological evaluation report.** The report should be issued by a qualified professional psychiatrist or licensed psychologist who regularly practices neuropsychology. The report must be based upon examination of the applicant within the last five years. The report must be written on, or accompanied by a letter written on, the evaluating professional’s letterhead. The requisite elements of a comprehensive evaluation are an intelligence test, an assessment of neuropsychological functions, an academic achievement test and psychiatric/psychological history. For diplomats seeking accommodations on the basis of attention deficit disorder or hyperactivity disorder, the evaluation must include a behavioral index. The requirements for the neuropsychosocial report are identified and described in greater detail in Appendix B.

**Evaluation of Accommodation Requests**

The AOBOO-HNS will review requests for accommodation upon receipt of the information identified above. The review process will attempt to determine: (a) if a diplomate is disabled and the nature of the disability, (b) whether the disability interferes with the diplomate’s ability to take the certifying examinations, (c) whether the requested accommodation is necessary to allow the diplomate to take the examinations, (d) whether a different accommodation would better serve the purpose of the certifying exam while still allowing the diplomate to take the examination.

Answers to these questions may not be clear from the documentation presented. Therefore, the certifying boards may request an opinion from an outside expert and either send the documentation submitted by the diplomate to the expert for review or ask the diplomate to be examined by an outside expert. Cost of consultation with an outside expert will be paid by the AOBOO-HNS.

Based on the review of all documentation, the AOBOO-HNS may decide to: (a) grant a request for accommodation, (b) grant a request for accommodation that is different from the requested accommodation, or (c) deny the request for accommodation. The AOBOO-HNS will notify the diplomate in writing of its decision. If the AOBOO-HNS decides not to grant a requested accommodation because a requested accommodation is a fundamental alteration or an undue burden, the Board shall notify the diplomate of any alternative methods of accommodation suggested by the expert which are acceptable to it or, if no such alternatives have been suggested, the AOBOO-HNS shall inform the diplomate and invite the diplomate to suggest alternative accommodations.

**Appeals**

If a request for accommodation has not been granted, a diplomate may request that the Board reconsider its decision or appeal the Board’s decision to the Appeal Committee of the Bureau of Osteopathic Specialists. Any appeal must be submitted to the secretary of the BOS president within sixty (60) days of the date of the AOBOO-HNS written decision concerning the request for accommodation.

**Procedures for Examination Administration**

Where possible, examinations for disabled persons will be proctored and will be given on the same day as other examinations. The location of the examination administration will be determined by the Board on the basis of feasibility of providing necessary services and convenience to the diplomate. Where appropriate, to reduce the effect of the diplomate’s disability on his/her performance on the examination, the following accommodations may be provided: (a) disabled persons may be tested separately, (b) disabled persons may be given assistance in reading or recording answers, (c) auxiliary aids and services can be offered, but only if they do not fundamentally alter the measurement of skills or knowledge the examination is intended to test and they would not result in an undue burden to the Board; and/or (d) time extensions may be granted to accommodate disabled diplomats. Other accommodations will be made upon presentation of appropriate information and documentation supporting the requested documentation.

**APPENDIX C**

**Required Elements of the Neuropsychosocial Report**

1. **Intelligence Tests.** The Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale-Revised is mandatory. The report may include other estimates of verbal and nonverbal intelligence deemed appropriate by the professional preparing the report, such as Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, Raven’s Progressive Matrices or Leiter International.

2. **Assessment of Neuropsychological Functions,** including: (a) a complete, integrated neuropsychological battery, such as the Halstead-Reitan Neuropsychological Battery or the Luria Nebraska Neuropsychological Battery; (b) memory assessments that utilize an age-normed, standardized instrument assessing both verbal and nonverbal memory such as the Wechsler Memory Scale-Revised; and (c) assessments of the specific cognitive and perceptual processes affected by the disability. Examples: in cases of auditory-verbal learning disabilities, include specific tests of phonemic processing. In cases of attention deficit disorder, include specific tests of sustained attentional resources, such as the Continuous Performance Test.

3. **Academic Achievement Test Results.** Standardized, comprehensive academic achievement test, appropriately normed for the diplomate’s age group, including assessment of spelling, arithmetic and reading comprehension.

4. **Psychological/Psychiatric History,** including (a) standardized psychometric assessment of personality and emotional functioning (MMPI-2 or MCMI-II); (b) standard diagnostic interview for presence of current psychiatric disorders; and (c) if the diplomate has undergone treatment for a psychological or psychiatric condition within the past three years, provide a report, including diagnosis, from the treating mental health professional.

5. **Behavioral Indices (required only for diplomats seeking accommodations on the basis of attention deficit disorder or hyperactivity disorder)** using standardized psychometric assessments of behavioral indices of attention deficit disorder, such as the Wender Scales or the Achenbach Scale.

The professional’s report should address all appropriate elements relevant to the request for accommodation of disability. With respect to each element, the report should include the name of each test administered, its date, a description of the diplomate’s performance in each of the areas of the test battery, a summary of test scores, and a complete diagnostic formulation in standard DSM-IV terminology utilizing all diagnostic axes. Diagnostic formulations should integrate current testing findings with academic and psychiatric histories. Raw test data should be available upon request.

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