

Kathleen Davidson | *COE MEMBER SPOTLIGHT*

Atlantic Retina Consultants, FL

10+ years in ophthalmology

Tell us about yourself and your current role:

I currently serve in an administrative leadership role at Atlantic Retina Consultants, a multi-location retina practice in Florida. My responsibilities span practice operations, team development, compliance, revenue cycle initiatives, patient access, referral relationships, and strategic growth.

What I enjoy most is identifying where a practice can function better and building practical solutions that support our physicians, employees, and patients. I am very hands-on by nature and believe the best operational decisions come from understanding what is actually happening at every level of the practice.

I have been in ophthalmology for more than a decade and earned my COA early in my career. I joined Atlantic Retina Consultants in January 2026. My career has progressed from direct clinical care into training, operations, and administrative leadership, giving me the opportunity to understand ophthalmology from several different perspectives.

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

I was drawn to ophthalmology because it combines highly specialized medicine with the ability to make a meaningful difference in a patient's quality of life. I began on the clinical side, where I developed a deep appreciation for both the complexity of the specialty and the people providing the care.

As my career progressed, I became increasingly interested in why some teams, workflows, and practices functioned better than others. I found that I genuinely enjoyed identifying problems, understanding their root causes, and creating systems that made the work better. That curiosity gradually led me from clinical care into leadership and practice administration.

What inspired you to pursue the COE certification?

As my responsibilities grew, I wanted to make sure my professional knowledge grew with them. Much of what I knew about practice administration had been developed through years of hands-on experience, and pursuing the COE gave me an opportunity to strengthen that experience with a comprehensive understanding of ophthalmic management.

It was also important to me to challenge myself. Leadership carries a tremendous amount of responsibility, and I believe the people who trust us to make decisions deserve leaders who are willing to continually invest in becoming better at what they do.

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

I approached the exam by first identifying the areas where my day-to-day experience was strongest and then focusing additional study time on subjects where I had less exposure. I used the COE content areas to structure my preparation rather than studying everything with the same intensity.

I also connected the material to situations I had encountered throughout my career. Being able to attach a concept to an actual staffing, financial, compliance, or operational decision made the information much easier for me to understand and retain.

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

The biggest challenge was finding dedicated study time while managing a demanding professional role and a very full life outside of work.

I also had to recognize that years of experience can occasionally work against you on an exam. There is a difference between knowing how something has historically been handled in a particular practice and understanding the broader management principle being tested. Learning to separate the two was challenging, but it was also one of the most valuable parts of the process.

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

Do not wait until you feel like you know everything before deciding you are ready. Start by honestly assessing what you already know and where your experience has left gaps.

Give yourself enough time to study those weaker areas, but do not underestimate the knowledge you have gained through years of doing the work. Most importantly, focus on understanding the reasoning behind the concepts rather than memorizing information. The preparation process itself is valuable, regardless of how experienced you already are.

How has achieving this certification impacted your professional development?

Achieving the COE gave me greater confidence in the breadth of knowledge I had developed throughout my career while also showing me areas where I still want to grow.

It helped me see my experience more comprehensively. Instead of viewing clinical operations, financial management, human resources, compliance, and leadership as separate responsibilities, I gained an even greater appreciation for how interconnected they are. That broader perspective has made me more intentional in the way I approach decisions as an administrator.

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

Strong administration is not separate from patient care. It creates the environment in which good patient care can happen.

For my team, that means clearer processes, stronger training, better communication, and leadership that understands the realities of their work. For the organization, it means making thoughtful decisions that balance operational, financial, regulatory, and human considerations. For our patients, those decisions ultimately translate into better access, greater efficiency, and a practice capable of consistently delivering high-quality care.

What motivates you to continue pursuing learning and professional development?

Curiosity is a large part of it. I genuinely enjoy understanding how things work, particularly when learning something new allows me to solve a problem differently or make a better decision.

The more responsibility I have taken on throughout my career, the more aware I have become of how much there is still to learn. I find that motivating rather than intimidating. Every new area I understand gives me another tool I can use to lead more effectively.

How did you celebrate after earning your certification?

I celebrated mostly by sharing the news with the people who had been cheering me on throughout the process and allowing myself to enjoy the accomplishment for a minute. Like many people in healthcare administration, I am usually already thinking about the next project or goal, so taking the time to recognize what I had accomplished was important.

Then, admittedly, I started thinking about what I wanted to learn next.

Who supported or inspired you most along this journey?

I have been fortunate to work with physicians and colleagues throughout my career who trusted me with increasing responsibility and challenged me to grow into it. That trust has had a tremendous influence on my professional development.

I am also continually inspired by the people doing the work every day. Some of the most important lessons I have learned as a leader have come from listening to employees, understanding what makes their jobs difficult, and recognizing where leadership can make a meaningful difference. My family and close friends have also been an important source of support and perspective throughout the journey.

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

Outside of work, most of my time is spent with my family. I am a mom, so life outside the office is usually busy in a completely different way. I enjoy being involved in my children's activities and finding opportunities to be creative.

What is next on your professional development journey?

The COE has opened the door to several areas I want to explore more deeply. My next goals include expanding my expertise in retina coding, human resources, compliance, and executive practice management through additional education and certifications.

Long term, I want to continue developing into a well-rounded healthcare executive who can move comfortably between the clinical, operational, financial, and strategic sides of an organization. I do not have a finish line in mind for professional development. I expect my goals to continue evolving as my responsibilities and opportunities do.

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!