

# ALL ABOUT THE LETTERS

Leslie Arnold, COE

I wanted three letters: C-O-E. My entire career has been spent looking up to those with letters behind their names: MD, OD, COA, COT, RN, etc. As simple as that might sound, I knew that without a degree or certification I would always just be someone without the letters that meant so much. That represented hard work, dedication, and knowledge.

## HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

I started out in 1988 as a 19-year-old receptionist for Leon Cohn, MD, in Sunrise, Florida, with no experience—and I had recently dropped out of college. Working in the mall was not going to pay the bills. I aspired to attend nursing school someday, but the immediate need was a steady job.

Later my first office manager at Dr. Cohn's office told me that I got the job because I was the only applicant who spelled ophthalmology correctly. It wasn't hard. It was on the front door of the office. I guess I cheated, but what they didn't know wouldn't hurt them.

## LEARNING FROM THE PEOPLE WITH THE LETTERS

With no experience, I had to learn how to work in healthcare by watching and listening to the people with the letters. Before the days of the internet and Google, I read anything in the office I could get my hands on. I borrowed textbooks from the people with the letters. I asked questions. I

wanted to know everything. The people with the letters had the dedication and work ethic that resonated with me. I fell in love with ophthalmology. This is where I wanted to be.

Then I relocated to North Carolina and joined Raleigh Eye Center, where I still work today. I kept learning. I was fortunate enough to work in almost every department, continuing to learn through the examples of the people with the letters.

## LETTERS MEANT FOR SOMEONE LIKE ME

As I settled into the business side of healthcare, I realized my opportunities to get letters of my own were few. I thought COE certification was way over my head, reserved only for seasoned practice administrators with master's degrees in Healthcare Administration and certainly not intended for a 33-year healthcare veteran like me, who could claim only the moniker "Office Jack of All Trades." As it turns out, I am exactly who this certification is meant for.

At age 52, I decided to take a chance. Studying for the test was hard. I had to pull together all the years of experience I had gained and everything the people with the letters had taught me. I had to study material that I hadn't referenced in years. The flash cards had me pulling bits of ophthalmology trivia from the recesses of my brain. I realized there was still so much to learn.

There had never been a COE at Raleigh Eye before and I was determined. If I failed, it would seem that my 33 years of experience had been a waste. This was my only chance.

When I passed, one of my physicians said, "Well of course; you probably could have written the test."

I shake my head and think to myself *if he only knew*.

## LETTERS THAT ARE NOW MINE

I am a lifer. A rare breed, brought into the field at age 19 with no experience who decided to stick around and who evolved my technology skills, starting with the IBM Selectric typewriter used to fill out paper HCFA 1500 forms one at a time, then moving to the speedy PCs, laptops, tablets, and iPhone that are my tools today. As with any career, you must adapt and change with the times.

But one of the most important things that helps me do my job are the letters that are now mine. They sit behind my name, boost my confidence, make me feel worthy and accomplished. They help me realize my value. Now I can be the one with letters that someone new to ophthalmology can look up to. **AE**



Leslie Arnold, COE  
(919-876-2427; [larnold@raleigheyecenter.com](mailto:larnold@raleigheyecenter.com)) is the business manager at Raleigh Eye Center, Raleigh, N.C.

Raleigh, N.C.