

# Board Certification: How We See It

*ODs share views on becoming American Board of Optometry Diplomates.*



**O**ptometrists are inherently optimists. They believe it's not only possible, but positively necessary, to elevate the patient's quality of life by supporting ocular health and proper vision. Ideally, they are devoted to providing accessible and cost-effective care to all their patients. As dedicated professionals, they look for ways to show that their commitment to patient care grows even stronger with time.

All of that certainly can be said of American Board of Optometry Diplomates – optometrists who have passed the organization's Board Certification exam, and enrolled in its 10-year Maintenance of Certification continuing education program. These are practitioners who have shown commitment by embracing a learning process they are not required to undertake. Think about it – what patient wouldn't want a health care provider who elects to study beyond the required minimum? What patient wouldn't feel more comfortable knowing the doctor on the other side of the slit lamp has made an active choice for lifelong learning?

To gain an idea of what Board Certification means, view the field from the perspectives of five ODs who've chosen to add "Diplomate" to their credentials. They hail from different areas of the country, care for diverse patient mixes, and belong to a Diplomate network that's nearly 3,000 strong. What they have most in common is their understanding that optometry is an evolving science, one where they must remain on the cutting edge – in theory and in practice.

**Lillian Kalaczinski OD** practices at Cherry Street Health Services, a Federally Qualified Health Center in Grand Rapids, Mich. She became Board Certified in 2014.

**Paul Karpecki OD, FAAO**, practices at Koffler Vision Group in Lexington, Ky., and is a nationally known author, educator, editor and lecturer. He became Board Certified in 2014.

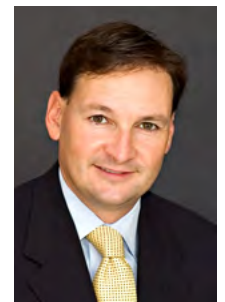
**Stephen Montaquila OD, FAAO**, well known for his work in organized optometry, practices at West Bay Eye Associates in Warwick, R.I. He became Board Certified in 2011.

**Essence Robinson OD, FAAO**, practices at Southeast Dallas Health Center in Texas. She completed a residency in ocular disease, and became Board Certified in 2013.

**Eugene Shifrin OD** is an educator and serves as medical director for Nationwide Vision, a 64-location practice in Arizona. He became Board Certified in 2011.

## ***Why did you decide to enter the Board Certification program?***

**DR. KARPECKI:** First, we always have to continue advancing as a profession. There is never any downside to furthering our knowledge and challenging ourselves. Being a speaker and clinical review editor, in all the various areas in which I serve, I felt it was important. Second, health care is so dynamic, I always had it in the back of my mind that Board Certification could really set the profession apart, and I wanted to be prepared. I would have done it earlier if my family hadn't grown by three children in less than two years.



Karpecki

I have a lot of colleagues who ask, “Are you Board Certified?” Before, I just told them that I thought it was a good idea, but that wasn’t the same as saying I’d actually done it. Now I’ve completed it, and I can definitely say it’s worth the study and preparation – a very achievable task. It’s a challenge, but doable.



Montaquila

**DR. MONTAQUILA:** I became a Diplomate for several reasons. I realized that third party payors are increasingly looking for ways to differentiate among providers, and demonstrating a commitment to lifelong learning is one such way. Board Certification presented me with a challenging opportunity to further my knowledge base in eye health and vision care. And we know that other health-care providers place a high value on board certification, and on maintenance of certification. As optometrists seek to become more integrated members of the health care delivery team, I feel this credential will take on greater meaning and create more opportunities for us.

### ***Why do you think Board Certification is important in the field of optometry?***

**DR. SHIFRIN:** If we want to keep the highest standards possible, as other professions do, then we have to have this program. If we want to be on an equal footing with other professions, especially ophthalmology, we have to have a similar certification process in place. Our doctors have to be on the same level. After taking the test, I believe this program is the one that will hold water.

The profession is changing so much. It’s always evolving, so if you become Board Certified, it allows you to keep up. I often meet with doctors who opposed Board Certification a few years ago; now they’re asking what I think of it, and telling me they plan to take the exam. They can feel that the culture is changing, and they want to be part of it.

**DR. MONTAQUILA:** It is important that we attain and maintain the same rigorous lifelong learning commitment that other health-care professionals have. I believe this (program) is simply the natural evolution of the profession.

**DR. KALACZINSKI:** As we all know, health care changes rapidly, so we must be dedicated, lifelong learners and be willing to prove ongoing competence to our patients. I expect my children's pediatrician to prove his competence periodically; I must hold myself to the same standard.

**DR. ROBINSON:** In my opinion, Board Certification helps standardize our profession to align with other health professions, and with insurance regulations. It helps support the fact that we are dedicated to the continued growth of our profession, and deserve the same regard and respect as other health professions.



Robinson

### ***What has Board Certification meant for your career?***

**DR. KARPECKI:** I serve as an expert witness for cases involving colleagues and patients. When I’m involved in a case, one of the first things the courts ask is, “Are you Board Certified?” They are well aware of it. There was a case where the expert

testifying for the patient didn't have that, and it made a big difference. The courts have made a major point of asking that question, so I've been very glad I have my Board Certification. Having taken the exam also helps me ensure that I cover the right topics in my lectures.

**DR. ROBINSON:** Being a Diplomate, residency trained, and a fellow in the Academy has set me apart from my colleagues practicing in the same demographic area. It helps distinguish you, and can keep you grouped with colleagues who also are committed to continuing growth and education. Because of my (Diplomate) status, I've personally been challenged to seek more CE (continuing education), and specifically CEE (continuing education with examination) courses.

### ***Did taking the exam help you learn anything new about yourself?***

**DR. KARPECKI:** It helped me realize the areas I'm strongest in and where I need to brush up, because patients can come in to the office with any situation. Just a week after the test, I had a patient present with an emergency case very similar to something I'd just been through on the exam. It was very relevant to my practice.

**DR. KALACZINSKI:** I remembered that I am a scholar at heart, and am now seriously considering a master's degree program. I approached this as a personal challenge and an unbiased evaluation of my knowledge and clinical skills. I actually enjoyed studying for the exam.



Kalaczinski

### ***How do you communicate your Board Certification to patients, colleagues, and the public? What do they say about it?***

**DR. ROBINSON:** On my resume, social media and the Internet. For colleagues, especially those I work with, it has inspired them to begin the process. Many patients give me compliments on my accomplishments, and find comfort in having a doctor committed to lifelong learning and staying up to date in the profession.

**DR. KALACZINSKI:** I have let my colleagues know about it. I practice in a large Federally Qualified Community Health Center, and the administrative and clinical leadership have been very supportive and encouraging.

### ***What are your thoughts about the exam and its content?***



Shifrin

**DR. SHIFRIN:** I figured this test would be designed for the general optometric population, so when I was studying, I tried to cover as many topics as I could.

I think the exam is written to a broad spectrum of knowledge, and it provides a good understanding of the conditions we're seeing.

Some doctors practice more medical optometry; others practice more refractive. Others do a lot of low vision and vision therapy; if you're Board Certified, you have knowledge of all of it.

**DR. MONTAQUILA:** The exam was more than fair. It was representative of everyday optometric practice, covering a wide variety of topics including eye and related systemic health, and all aspects of vision care.

**DR. KARPECKI:** What I like is that the exam allows doctors in any setting to become certified. Maybe you spend a lot of your time in anterior segment, cornea, or emergencies, for example; but the exam involves optics and lenses too, and other specialty areas, so that's helpful. It's good to be challenged.

### ***What advice do you give to other ODs – and OD students – considering Board Certification?***

**DR. SHIFRIN:** As soon as my students come in, I tell them that the Board Certification exam is their next step after school. As they go out, they're all thinking about it; they don't even bat an eyelash. It's how they want to practice. I tell them, once you pass the exam, you'll represent a group of doctors who are trying to move the field forward.

Some ODs may feel apprehensive about taking it because it's been a long time since they were in school, but the field is so different now. When they took their original boards, we didn't have therapeutic drops; we only had diagnostic drops. Now, new grads are doing injectable and laser work. We're performing more procedures, and that allows us to be more primary-care doctors. I think we have to provide that care at the highest level.

**DR. ROBINSON:** I would say, take the challenge and make the commitment to become a Diplomate. It's an investment not only in yourself, but in our profession.

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*The American Board of Optometry's mission is to continually improve patient care by helping optometrists demonstrate ongoing commitment to professional enrichment. This is done through the organization's voluntary, NCCA-certified Board Certification program and CMS-approved Maintenance of Certification process. The American Board of Optometry was founded in 2009 by the American Academy of Optometry, American Optometric Association, American Optometric Student Association and the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry. For additional information, visit [www.americanboardofoptometry.org](http://www.americanboardofoptometry.org).*



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