
Developing an Effective Workforce:

Allied Ophthalmic Personnel

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Background:

The World Health Organisation recommends the use of the term **Allied Ophthalmic Personnel (AOP)** to represent the universe of all allied eye care staff (including, but not limited to refractionists, orthoptists, opticians, vision technicians, operating theatre assistants, outpatient and ward assistants, patient counsellors, ocularists and vision rehabilitation workers). This cadre is critical to ophthalmologist-led eye care teams. They have the potential to greatly increase productivity, improve quality and significantly lower costs.

There are many opinions and little consensus on what AOP cadre must be allowed to do. But almost always there is agreement that this is an important cadre, not only for an ophthalmic practice to grow sustainably, but also to address the larger challenge of increasing productivity of the ophthalmic workforce.

Creating an effective AOP cadre poses two major sets of challenges relating to: 1) **effective training** and 2) **getting the best out of AOP** at work.

About this workshop:

In view of the above challenges, we feel, it is important to set up a platform for various stakeholders to come together and explore ways to enhance the training and deployment of AOP. This **consultative workshop** aims to bring together organizations that face these issues and deliberate on ways to overcome these challenges and to share best practices and relevant resources.

The organizations that we believe, can contribute to this important consultation are:

- Mid to large scale eye care institutions that regularly train AOP cadres and
- Voluntary organizations that support AOP training.

Overall goal of the consultative workshop is **to arrive at strategies to effectively train and deploy allied ophthalmic personnel.**

The **objectives** of this workshop are to:

- Identify best practices in training AOP cadres
- Identify and share resources for AOP training
- Elicit common challenges in getting the best out of our AOP cadres
- Develop strategies to overcome those challenges

This document briefly lays out the challenges that eye care organisations and training institutions face. These will form the focus of the deliberations of this workshop.

Challenges in Training AOP:

To address the lack of availability of trained manpower, eye care institutions often have to train their own AOP. While some of these are formally structured training, most others remain unstructured on-the-job training. Although there is an increase in training institutions, most of them train only optometrists, ophthalmic assistants and ophthalmic technicians. Accreditation bodies such as IJCAHPO and India's Healthcare Sector Skills Council (HSSC) address this issue to some extent. Nevertheless, given the diverse nature of roles that come under the 'AOP' title, institutions are forced to create their own training programmes and make it locally relevant.

In the first part of the workshop we discuss the challenges pertaining to AOP training:

How do we train the AOP to be effective at the workplace?

Aspect	Challenges
Trainee Recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attracting trainees to the training programme • Getting the right candidate for the job role
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designing the training to ensure the desired level of performance at work • How to teach skills effectively? • Ensuring trainer effectiveness • Balancing the workload of training and patient care • Training for essential soft skills • Getting feedback from trainees to improve effectiveness of training
Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparing trainee for the qualifying examinations (university exam etc.) • Assessing all aspects to ensure readiness for work knowledge, attitude and skills

Challenges in getting the best out of AOP:

AOP occupy vital and diverse positions in an eye hospital. It is important that all aspects of staff deployment are considered to ensure that they perform at their best at the workplace. Poorly deployed AOP can affect quality of care, drive up costs, cause staff dissatisfaction and increase attrition among this critical cadre.

In the second part, we discuss the challenges in getting the best out of our AOP staff:

How do we get the best out of our AOP cadre?

Aspect	Challenges
Deployment, Management & Retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring graduated trainees are placed appropriately and used well • Ensuring AOP staff are able to give their best at work • Engaging AOP in continuous quality improvement • Providing career development opportunities for AOP • Ensuring AOP staff satisfaction and reducing attrition
Continuing professional education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluating training needs on a regular basis • Providing necessary training and exposure • Resources for training

Regulations and their implications on AOP cadres:

We will also spend some time to understand the regulations in India regarding allied health personnel, especially with the new NMC bill that has been passed in the Rajya Sabha. We will briefly explore the implication of such regulations on our AOP cadres.