

**“The Importance of My Role on the Eye Care Team”**  
**by Joanne Harris, COT**

Since September, 1992, I have had the privilege of directing a technician level training program. As I approach my final year, I pause to reflect on the role I have played over the years with the eye care team.

I began working in ophthalmology in 1975. I have been blessed to work with some outstanding ophthalmologists, technicians, and staff. Along the way, though my jobs may have changed, in many ways my role has remained the same. While learning to become proficient at necessary clinical skills in my very first job, I was given an opportunity to see the importance of various roles on the team. For seven years I worked for a dedicated, skilled physician who was passionate about his chosen field, though not always at ease with the personal side of patient relationships. It did not take us long to develop a mutual respect for the various talents we both brought to patient care. As a physician he knew he could count on my accurate, thorough work ups; while on the personal side I would provide important information about our patients (birthdays, anniversaries, illnesses, etc.) His exams/medical decision making and surgical skills were without equal and he would spend as much time as needed explaining the patient’s condition, treatment, or surgery. Somehow he’d always manage to bring up something personal I had brought to his attention. The outcome was a patient who left our practice feeling well cared for, both medically and as a person. One of my mantras over the years became: “Patients don’t always know when they are getting good medical care, but they do know when they are having a positive *experience*.” Technicians often make all the difference in that statement.

As I found myself years later training technicians versus working as one, I tried to share some of those simple touches that can make a profound difference for a patient. Equally important are other qualities and traits that make everyone a valuable member of a team. Physicians often tell me what they want in a technician: skill, integrity, willingness to learn, professionalism, a strong work ethic, a sense of responsibility for practice success, and an understanding that every person in the practice is an important part of the team. I’ve come to view my current role with students as one who bridges the gap between technical experience and the equally important so-called soft skills. The goal is to produce the next generation of skilled technicians who understand their importance on the team, not just as it relates to patient care, but for the practice as a whole. Those who can see the “big picture” have practically guaranteed themselves a career that they’ll find rewarding for years to come.

When I began working in ophthalmology I had no idea that I was embarking on a career that would provide me with such personal satisfaction, extraordinary opportunities, long standing personal relationships, and great joy. I am grateful for those who have helped me along the way by training, encouraging, sharing pearls of wisdom and assisting me when I needed a hand. As I look to the next phase of my life the “team”, and all it taught me, comes along. My guess is once you are on the eye care team, you never really retire.