

## Goals for the Program

The Ophthalmic Technologist who works in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut takes on a significant responsibility. First of all, ophthalmic techs who work in the Northwest Territories/Nunavut travel independently to remote communities to prescribe eyeglasses and screen for eye disease. They must carry a high level of knowledge and practical skill in order to be able to function in this capacity. It is the goal of the Stanton Territorial Health and Social Services Authority (NTHSSA) Ophthalmic Medical Technology Training Program to train individuals to be able to take on this responsibility comfortably.

The Ophthalmic Medical Technology Training Program started out in 1978 as the Ophthalmic Medical Technician Training Program. The ophthalmologist at the time, Dr. Graham Gillan, recognized the need for more regular eye examinations for people living in remote parts of the North. He realized that a single ophthalmologist could not achieve this goal and decided to train technicians to be able to deliver primary eye care in the Northwest Territories. Dr. Gillan knew that he would need techs that are highly skilled and knowledgeable in the area of ophthalmology as well as having a strong base in general medical knowledge. He decided to start a formal training program and modeled it after the Ophthalmic Technician Program that was being offered by the Canadian Military's National Defense Medical Centre.

The Stanton OMTTP became accredited to the technologist level in 1992 under the accreditation body (CoA-OMP), with continuous accreditation by the Canadian Medical Association (CMA), and currently, the International Council of Accreditation (ICA). We consider the Stanton Program to be unique for many different reasons. One of these is that ours is the only program that does not require its students to have previous post-secondary education. The upside to this is that people from all backgrounds have the opportunity to apply for the program. The downside is that few of our graduates meet the requirements to write the certification exam to the technologist level, as the certifying body (JCAHPO) states that applicants must complete a program and have two years of post-secondary education. That being said, our graduates score near the top on certification exams at the technician level and the technologist level when they become eligible to write them.

The Stanton OMTTP is a single site program where the students have access to patients all day, every day. Having the program located in the Stanton Eye Clinic allows students to see any rare cases that may come in and demonstrations can be performed immediately after lecture material is taught.

There is a large volume of patients to provide the full spectrum of clinical material necessary for training. Trainees accompany senior technicians/technologists on travel clinics and learn to become very flexible by working in conditions less than that modern ophthalmic office. The geography of the region served by the Stanton Eye Clinic is such that self-reliance and sound judgments are necessary with all concerned in providing health care because help is not “just around the corner.”

Stanton Territorial Hospital Ophthalmic Medical Technology Training Program (OMTTP) follows a 24-month curriculum, which trains people to perform certain tests and duties under the supervision of an ophthalmologist. These roles include taking medical histories, performing diagnostic tests, administering medications, maintaining equipment, assisting in ophthalmic surgery, and prescribing correction for refractive errors. These duties are required of those employed as Ophthalmic Technicians and Technologists by the Stanton Territorial Health Authority. STHA Ophthalmic Technicians and Technologists are based in the Yellowknife eye clinic but also travel smaller communities in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut to deliver eye care services.

Our program is designed to develop skills in ophthalmology, which enables the graduate to work independently to gather medical information to assist the ophthalmologist in making a diagnosis and determining treatment for eye disease. Core areas of study are ophthalmic optics, refractometry, ophthalmic pharmacology, human anatomy and physiology, ocular motility, ocular disorders and diseases, ophthalmic ultrasonography, and ophthalmic photography.

One of the strengths of the Stanton OMTTP is that students are immersed into the clinic from the outset of the program. The Stanton Territorial Hospital Eye Clinic is a stand-alone clinic separate from the hospital building. The training program is located in the eye clinic building to facilitate easy access to patients for student learning.

Early in program students observe other technicians and technologists, gradually accepting more duties in the clinic. As students approach the end of the program other technicians and technologists do little more than observe and supervise the students. Students are also required travel to smaller Northern communities to set up and work on “travel clinics” along with an experienced technician or technologist.

Employment opportunities in this field of health care are excellent. Graduates of the Stanton training program find jobs in the eye clinic in Yellowknife and with ophthalmologists, hospitals, universities and surgery centres in other parts of the world.