By Beth Thomas Hertz

When Gus Stern, MD, and Sidney Chang, MD, were studying for their Ophthalmic Knowledge Assessment Program (OKAP) examinations during residency, they always felt like the review books they were using were outdated.

“We really wanted a more contemporary knowledge base,” Dr. Stern said. “We struggled to create our own multiple-choice questions and really saw a need.”

The two went on to fellowships and private practice, but never forgot their vision for something better. About a year ago, they finally started working on a Web site to help ophthalmic trainees study, and it went live in August.

Their joint creation, www.OphthoQuestions.com, uses an interactive question-and-answer format that helps subscribers prepare for their OKAPs, written boards, and recertification for boards. The site was created by two physicians who saw the need for such an interactive study tool when they were in residency.

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Their joint creation, www.OphthoQuestions.com, uses an interactive question-and-answer format that helps subscribers prepare for their OKAPs, written boards, and other exams.

“It has thousands of questions on all aspects of ophthalmology, and it simulates the real exam better than any other study tool, including being timed,” Dr. Stern said. “It is easy to navigate and gives you instant feedback with detailed explanations about the correct answers. It really lets you use your study time well.”

Users can select the number of questions they would like to answer in each session. They also can see how their results rank against other users, so they know how their scores will compare.

“Constant updating
Also, as Dr. Stern, who now has a private practice in Houston specializing in cornea, and Dr. Chang, who practices glaucoma and comprehensive ophthalmology in Hawaii, wanted so much during residency, the material is never out of date.

“We work on it a few hours each night after the kids are in bed to update it, and we have contributors from many areas who help us keep it current in their field of expertise,” he said.

Among some of the contributors:

- Raquel Goldhardt, MD, an assistant professor of ophthalmology at the Bascom Palmer Eye Institute and VA hospital in Miami who specializes in retinal diseases and uveitis.
- Peter Kastl, MD, PhD, a professor of ophthalmology at Tulane University, New Orleans, whose areas of clinical expertise include cataract, refractive, and corneal surgery. He also is editor-in-chief of “Contact Lenses: The CLAO Guide to Basic Science and Clinical Practice.”
- Kevin Kirchner, MD, an oculoplastics fellow in Warren, MI.
- Lisa Leishman, MD, an ocular pathology fellow at the Moran Eye Center (under the tutelage of Nick Mamalis, MD), Salt Lake City.
- Nick Mamalis, MD, director of the ophthalmic pathology laboratory at the Moran Eye Center.
- Collin McClelland, MD, a neuro-ophthalmology fellow at Scheie Eye Institute in Philadelphia.
- Craig Swartz, PhD, a researcher and instructor at Texas State University, San Marcos, where he teaches physics, including optics.

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Results

Users are telling Dr. Stern that they are impressed with the Web site.

“We have more than double the number of questions of the next best resource,” he said.

“We are over 2,500 now and are always adding more. We also are one of the only resources that incorporates optics and pathology.”

In addition, users have the option of posting comments about particular questions if they disagree with an answer or see any type of problem. These e-mails are then sent to
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the contributors with a back-end link that takes them directly to the question in the database. The information is verified and corrected if necessary.

“Review books can’t do that,” Dr. Stern said. “What we offer is reliable, realistic, comprehensive, and interactive.”

Subscribing

Drs. Stern and Chang hope to find a corporate sponsor that can cover the costs of maintaining the site—such as hosting the server, updating the design, and procuring relevant images—so they can offer it free to users. For now, however, there is a fee.

Through the end of 2011, a 30-day subscription is $19.99 (rising to $49.99 in January). A 60-day subscription is $29.99 (rising to $79.99). Other time frames are also available.

Renewing an account costs slightly less, as long as the renewal is submitted before the original subscription expires. Most major credit cards and PayPal are accepted for payment.

All previous test results and cumulative performance are stored for users, even if they do not have an active subscription, so they can resume access to them later.

As of mid-September, about 70 people had subscribed to the site.

Although the site’s primary users are likely to be residents preparing for OKAPs and recently graduated residents preparing for written boards, Dr. Stern said he does envision mid-career ophthalmologists using it to prepare to recertify their boards every decade.

“We really think it’s relevant to all demographics,” he concluded.

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