

Physicians Face Expiration of Board Certification

For the first time ever, many U.S. physicians are facing the necessity of taking board re-certification exams. In the past, physicians were issued lifetime certification without renewal requirements; however, in recent years, the member boards of the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) have begun instituting a continuing education and re-certification program, requiring that certified physicians renew their certification every six to ten years.¹ While some sub-specialty boards began issuing time-limited certification as early as the late 1980's, others did not implement until much later (e.g., Diagnostic Radiology – 2002).² Although many older physicians were “grandfathered” in and are not required to obtain re-certification, they are also suggested to undergo the renewal process.³

Board certification is not required of U.S. physicians in order to practice their chosen specialty. However, it has become the gold standard for demonstrating expertise and commitment in their field to patients, providers, insurance companies, and quality organizations across the nation.⁴ In 2000, the 24 member specialty boards of the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) agreed to a universal recertification program for all medical specialties, the ABMS Maintenance of Certification® (MOC), which was formally approved in 2006. The MOC evaluates physician expertise in six core competencies: (1) patient care; (2) interpersonal and communication skills; (3) medical knowledge; (4) practice-based learning; (5) systems-based practice; and, (6) professionalism, which are measured using a four-part process.⁵

Although the ABMS MOC® has only been implemented in the last few years, it is rapidly gaining momentum. Most recently, the healthcare reform bills passed in March 2010 state that participation in MOC by physicians can fulfill the requirements of the Physician Quality Reporting Initiative (PQRI), a reporting system by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) which provides an incentive payment to physicians who report quality data for professional services provided to Medicare beneficiaries, set to begin in 2011.⁶

¹ “What Board Certification Means”, by American Board of Medical Specialties, http://www.abms.org/About_Board_Certification/means.aspx (Accessed 4/22/10)

² “Considering Recertification”, by Jeffrey M. Drazen and Debra F. Weinstein, *New England Journal of Medicine*, Vol. 362, No. 10, May 19, 2010, p. 946; “Maintenance of Certification: Diagnostic Radiology”, the American Board of Radiology, http://theabr.org/moc/moc_faq_who.html (Accessed 5/19/10)

³ “Doctors Face Board Specialty „Expiration Dates””, by Mariynn Marchione, *Huffington Post*, April 5, 2010, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/04/07/doctors-face-board-specia_n_528351.html (Accessed 4/22/10)

⁴ “What Board Certification Means”, by American Board of Medical Specialties, http://www.abms.org/About_Board_Certification/means.aspx (Accessed 4/22/10)

⁵ “ABMS Maintenance of Certification®”, American Board of Medical Specialties, http://www.abms.org/Maintenance_of_Certification/ABMS_MO_C.aspx (Accessed 4/22/10)

⁶ “ABMS MOC Included in Health Care Bill as Option to Assess Physician Quality”, American Board of Medical Specialties, March 23, 2010, https://www.abms.org/News_and_Events/Media_Newsroom/Releases/release_ABMSMOCInHlthcareBill_03232010.aspx (Accessed 4/22/10)



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