
New Options for Maintenance of Certification

Invited Commentary from NBPAS

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Maintenance of Certification (MOC) is a program for continued certification in a medical specialty that has been managed by the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS). In 2014 MOC was overhauled, replacing recertification every ten years with a program requiring physicians to enroll in continuous certification, paying annual fees, taking exams every two years, and completing practice improvement modules.

These changes created discomfort in the physician community, prompting questions about the rationale, justification and process behind MOC. In addition to concerns about added cost and time commitments for physicians, claims by the American Board of Internal Medicine (ABIM) that MOC is "evidence based" have seemed suspect, coming from literature review and observational studies. There are also questions about the value of written, multiple-choice testing for evaluation of general knowledge. Clinical decisions are often not black and white, yet test questions must have one best answer. Moreover, digital access to information—a keystone of evidence-based medicine—cannot be evaluated in this type of exam.

Concerns about the new MOC requirements prompted widespread opposition, and an online petition requesting a recall of MOC has gathered more than 22,500 signatures. This led a group of eminent physicians to challenge the ABMS/ABIM monopoly of MOC and create an alternative certification body: the National Board of Physicians and Surgeons (NBPAS). NBPAS is not-for-profit and, unlike ABIM, its board members are all unpaid. The requirements for NBPAS certification include previous certification by an ABMS member board, fifty hours of accredited CME within the preceding twenty-four months, a valid, unrestricted license to practice medicine, and no history of hospital privileges being permanently revoked. NBPAS certification charge is \$169 every two years, about half of ABIM.

NBPAS is already achieving rapid recognition. Despite the lengthy, multi-committee process required to amend a hospital's bylaws, NBPAS has been accepted as an alternative certification to ABMS boards at ten hospitals in just five months of existence. We hope Yale-New Haven Hospital soon joins with other leading hospitals in recognizing NBPAS certification.

NBPAS considers that issues regarding MOC are especially relevant for young physicians and recent graduates. For that reason, NBPAS created the Young Physician's Alliance (NBPAS YPA). YPA is focusing on creating a dialog with recent graduates and trainees to spread the word and optimize life-long learning opportunities for young people. If you are interested in learning more about NBPAS YPA, visit <https://nbpas.org/> or email alliance@nbpas.org.

As young physicians, it is our job to spread the word and make the change.