ABOUT ABMS

The American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) works in collaboration with 24 medical specialty boards, also known as ABMS Member Boards, to maintain the standards for physician certification. Our focus is to improve the quality of health care to patients, families, and communities by supporting the continuing professional development of medical and surgical specialists. We achieve our mission by using the standards as a framework for helping board certified specialists fulfill their potential as providers of quality health care.

Board certification standards originated a century ago by a visionary group of physicians with an innovative idea to establish a national system of requirements for the training and professional development of specialists. This vision led to the creation of medical specialty boards to certify a specialist’s knowledge and skills; the development of educational and practice benchmarks to help specialists improve care; and in 1933, the formation of ABMS to guide the process.

To date, more than 860,000 specialists obtained ABMS board certification as a way to represent their professional commitment to providing quality care. The public uses this designation to identify specialists capable of delivering safe and effective specialty care. And, it is recognized and trusted by the nation’s medical education, health care administrative, and policy making agencies as a marker for quality care.

ABMS MEMBER BOARDS

The Member Boards represent distinct and well-defined fields of medical practice based on major concepts in medical science and supported by accredited training programs. They award certification in the essential specialties and most emergent subspecialties to physicians who demonstrate the clinical judgment, skills, and attitudes for practice.

Board certification is the beginning of a physician’s personal commitment to professional excellence. It encompasses the ABMS Program for Maintenance of Certification (ABMS MOC®), an ongoing development process implemented by the Member Boards that emphasizes professionalism, patient safety, and practice improvement.

The Member Boards are independent entities. Each sets the standards particular to its specialty, determines how performance against those standards will be assessed, and makes tools and services available to support medical specialists’ engagement in continuous professional development and performance improvement. Their innovative initiatives have raised the bar for physician certification. Some of these activities have included:

- Interactive assessment tools using smart mobile technology to assess knowledge, fill knowledge gaps, and demonstrate proficiency.
- Performance in practice modules that emphasize quality improvement measures for patient care.
- Patient safety self-assessment activities designed to improve the delivery of safe and effective patient care.
- National registries for case logs and procedural outcomes to help with practice assessment and benchmarking with peer practitioners.
- Simulation courses to help identify challenges/vulnerabilities in a practice environment and implement steps to improve patient outcomes.
- Focused practice pathways offering opportunities to demonstrate and be recognized for additional expertise.

Our role within the health care system is to be a leader and influencer in quality improvement and the continuous professional development of physicians through assessment of their knowledge and skills. We also work with organizations across the continuum of health care to advance activities with existing initiatives such as meaningful use, performance improvement and patient safety, operational efficiency, commitment to care, and practice quality.

LEADER, CONTRIBUTOR, INFLUENCER

Our role within the health care system is to be a leader and influencer in quality improvement and the continuous professional development of physicians through assessment of their knowledge and skills. We also work with organizations across the continuum of health care to advance activities with existing initiatives such as meaningful use, performance improvement and patient safety, operational efficiency, commitment to care, and practice quality.

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THE MEMBER BOARDS AND ASSOCIATE MEMBERS OF ABMS

ABMS works with its Member Boards and Associate Members to improve the quality of graduate medical education, the standards of medical practice, and the physician certification process.

ABMS MEMBER BOARDS
Includes the year approved as an ABMS Member Board

1933 Founding Member Boards:
- American Board of Dermatology
- American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology
- American Board of Ophthalmology
- American Board of Otolaryngology

1935 American Board of Orthopaedic Surgery
- American Board of Pediatrics
- American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology
- American Board of Radiology
- American Board of Urology

1936 American Board of Internal Medicine
- American Board of Pathology

1937 American Board of Surgery

1940 American Board of Neurological Surgery

1941 American Board of Anesthesiology
- American Board of Plastic Surgery

1947 American Board of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation

1949 American Board of Colon and Rectal Surgery
- American Board of Preventive Medicine

1969 American Board of Family Medicine

1971 American Board of Allergy and Immunology
- American Board of Nuclear Medicine
- American Board of Thoracic Surgery

1979 American Board of Emergency Medicine

1991 American Board of Medical Genetics and Genomics

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS OF ABMS

Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME) Evaluates and accredits institutions and organizations offering Continuing Medical Education (CME) in the United States, accme.org.

Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) Evaluates and accredits post-MD medical residency programs in the United States, acgme.org.

American Hospital Association (AHA) National membership organization representing members’ perspectives and needs in national health policy development, legislative and regulatory debates, and judicial matters, aha.org.

American Medical Association (AMA) National membership organization uniting physicians in the United States to focus on professional and public health issues, ama-assn.org.

Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) National membership organization for enhancing the effectiveness of academic medicine, aamc.org.

Council of Medical Specialty Societies (CMSS) National membership organization providing an independent forum for discussion by medical specialists on issues of national interest and mutual concern, cmss.org.

Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG) Organization that evaluates whether international medical graduates (IMGs) are ready to enter United States graduate medical programs, and offers a variety of other programs for IMGs and the entities worldwide that educate, train, register/license, and employ them, ecfmg.org.

Federation of State Medical Boards (FSMB) Policy-focused organization promoting best practices in medical regulation and encouraging uniformity in how states license and discipline physicians. It collaborates with NBME to provide the United States Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE), fsmb.org.

National Board of Medical Examiners (NBME) Assessment organization that, along with FSMB, co-sponsors the USMLE, which is accepted by medical licensing authorities as the standard by which to judge candidates for medical licensure, nbme.org.

ABOUT SPECIALTIES AND SUBSPECIALTIES

Review the guide to medical specialties to read descriptions of each specialty and subspecialty for which certification is offered by an ABMS Member Board (s).
THE COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK

The competency framework, defined by ACGME and ABMS, represents the developmental outcomes (knowledge, skills, attitudes, and performance) that physicians demonstrate throughout their career. The competencies are aligned with the principles of the ABMS standards for certification. They address performance expectations related to the various settings and challenges physicians encounter in practice.

- **Professionalism**
  - Carrying out responsibilities safely and ethically.

- **Patient care and procedural skills**
  - Providing compassionate, appropriate, and effective patient care.

- **Medical knowledge**
  - Demonstrating medical knowledge and its application to patient care.

- **Practice-based learning and improvement**
  - Continuously improving patient care through self-evaluation and lifelong learning.

- **Interpersonal and communication skills**
  - Facilitating effective information exchange and collaboration with patients, their families, and other health professionals.

- **Systems-based practice**
  - Calling on other system resources to provide optimal health care.

INITIAL CERTIFICATION

The ABMS Member Boards’ certification programs are rooted in the professional and educational standards set by ABMS and the boards for medical specialty practice and certification. The program involves two basic phases of assessment within a continuous process: initial certification and maintaining certification.

Initial certification occurs soon after completion of residency training. Each ABMS board has identified what candidates must accomplish in order to be eligible for certification. Generally this involves:

- Finishing four years of premedical education in a college or university;
- Earning a medical degree (MD, DO or other credential approved by an ABMS Member Board) from a qualified medical school;
- Completing three to five years of full-time experience in a residency training program accredited by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME);
- Providing letters of attestation from the program director and/or faculty; and
- Obtaining an unrestricted medical license to practice medicine in the United States or Canada.

Candidates for certification must then pass an exam created and administered by their specialty’s board. These exams are developed by physicians and others who are subject experts in the specific area of medicine. Exams are developed against learning requirements, extensively tested, and refined over time. This is done to assure that the exam is a thorough, relevant, and fair assessment of a physician’s medical knowledge, clinical judgment, and diagnostic skills. Candidates who have passed the exam and completed all other requirements are considered certified as a specialist and a diplomate of their specialty board.

A similar eligibility process is followed for certified specialists seeking subspecialty certification. Candidates must be certified by their specialty board, then complete additional training during or after residency and successfully complete assessments of knowledge and clinical judgment in their subspecialty discipline before being granted certification in a subspecialty.

MAINTAINING CERTIFICATION

ABMS Member Boards support physicians’ transition from training to practice through the ABMS Program for Maintenance of Certification (ABMS MOC®). ABMS MOC provides physicians a mechanism to maintain their certification through engagement in continuous, specialty-specific assessment and improvement activities.

The activities in ABMS MOC are based on the competency framework, which reflect the evidence-based guidelines, national clinical and quality standards, and specialty best practices agreed upon by the boards. Activities are practice relevant, helping physicians to develop skills in areas such as interpersonal communication, team-based care, patient safety, and patient engagement.

Subject experts at the boards and related societies actively seek or develop tools and make available learning opportunities to support the requirements of MOC. These can include longitudinal assessments, clinical databases and registries, peer evaluations, and practice audits. Physicians complete the activities according to a schedule set by their specialty board. The activities also are aligned with similar professional performance assessment requirements.