AMERICAN BOARD OF MEDICAL SPECIALTIES

STANDARDS FOR CONTINUING CERTIFICATION

Draft for Stakeholder Comment

-Introduction-
INTRODUCTION

The American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) and its Member Boards have a unique role in professional self-regulation. ABMS serves the public and the medical profession by improving the quality of health care through setting professional standards for lifelong certification in partnership with Member Boards. ABMS assists Member Boards in their development and use of assessment and professional standards for the certification of physicians and medical specialists in the United States. Member Board certification programs serve the patients, families, and communities of the U.S. by providing individual physicians and medical specialists (diplomates) with specialty-specific credentials on which the public and those acting on its behalf can rely.

ABMS board certification is a program of rigorous, continuing professional assessment and development. It begins with initial certification and is sustained through continuing certification, which is an ongoing program that exemplifies a lifelong dedication to professional growth, excellence, and a commitment to the ABMS/Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) Core Competencies.

These new “Standards for Continuing Certification” (Standards) promote the design of integrated, specialty-specific programs by Member Boards that support diplomates’ continuing professional development and maintain the social contract between the public and the profession to improve the quality and safety of health care. Taken together, the Standards provide a comprehensive framework for Member Boards to design certification programs that meaningfully engage diplomates in activities relevant to their practice.

Programs for continuing certification should emphasize integration, both in the design of a seamless program as well as with the community they serve. The elements of a continuing certification program should complement one another; for example, meaningful assessment drives learning and improvement. To integrate with the community they serve, Member Boards should work collaboratively with key stakeholders to ensure high-priority population and public health needs and advances in the specialties are addressed within their continuing certification programs. Lastly, ABMS Member Boards should strive to develop programs that integrate seamlessly into a diplomate’s practice of medicine.

Member Boards’ certification programs should ensure that diplomates are in good professional standing, are keeping up to date with advances in medical knowledge, and are working to improve themselves, their colleagues, and the systems in which they work.

Professionalism is central to self-regulation of the profession, making it of paramount importance to board certification. To honor medicine’s social contract and uphold the public’s trust, individual diplomates are expected to affirm, reaffirm, and demonstrate their dedication to principles of professionalism through their interactions with patients, families, and other
health professionals. This entails a personal commitment to the welfare of patients and
collective efforts to improve the health care system for the benefit of society. Professionalism
should be a core element in the design and implementation of each Member Board’s continuing
certification program, thus communicating its centrality and cultivating professional behavior in
all diplomates.

See Appendices for information about the Continuing Board Certification: Vision for the Future
Commission (Vision Commission) recommendations that informed the development of these
Standards, a glossary, implementation and evolution of the ABMS Standards for Continuing
Certification, and more.
The Standards document has been organized into the following groupings: General Standards, Professional Standing, Lifelong Learning, and Improvement in Health and Health Care. The new Standards represent an evolution of previous continuing certification standards but retain the central elements of assessment, learning, and engagement in improvement activities.

These Standards are expectations for the design of Member Board continuing certification programs. Each Member Board must meet each requirement in a manner consistent with the spirit of the Standards and in a fashion consistent with its specialty. Each Standard has an associated commentary. Commentaries do not specify additional requirements, but they provide rationales and context, address important considerations, and offer guidance to the community’s expectations. The commentaries, which reflect the Vision Commission recommendations (see Appendix II) to increase cross-board consistency, clarify when consistency is important and when a specialty-specific variation is justified.

The Standards provide a comprehensive framework for Member Boards to design certification programs that prepare diplomates with the knowledge and resources to provide excellent patient care. Taken together, this portfolio of performance and participation standards provides a basis for determining that diplomates continue to meet the standards for knowledge, clinical skills, and professionalism signified by board certification by an ABMS Member Board.