



American Board of Medical Specialties

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ORGANIZATION	AMERICAN BOARD OF MEDICAL SPECIALTIES	POLICY NO.	3.02.13
TITLE	GENERAL POLICY ON CERTIFICATION BY MEDICAL SPECIALTY BOARDS		
ADOPTED BODY	ABMS Board of Directors	ADOPTED	June 22, 2023
RESPONSIBLE BODY	Committee on Certification (COCERT)	EFFECTIVE	
		REVIEWED	

Procedural Attachments: ☐ Yes ☒ No

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Keyword Search

Certification, Subspecialty Certification

☐ Internal Policy

☒ External Policy

RELATED POLICIES AND REPORTS	Policy No. and Title
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DEFINITIONS:

- (a) A “**Conjoint Board**” is a body established under the joint sponsorship of not less than two (2) Primary Boards, although national specialty organizations may be included as sponsors. The purpose of a Conjoint Board is to set training standards and evaluate the qualifications of individual candidates in an area of specialty practice common to the sponsoring groups. A Conjoint Board resembles a Primary Board in that it is separately incorporated and has similar responsibility for determination of requirements for certification, accepting candidates for certification, administering examinations, and issuing certificates. A Conjoint Board differs from a Primary Board in that it is established and functions under the joint sponsorship of not less than two (2) Primary Boards. A Conjoint Board’s members are appointed by some or all of the respective sponsors and approved by the sponsoring Primary Boards, its policies are determined in conformity with the policies jointly established by the sponsoring boards, and it may or may not be financially independent. Applicants for certification by a Conjoint Board must complete satisfactorily a preliminary training program acceptable to at least one (1) of the sponsoring boards and to the Conjoint Board in order to be considered for examination by the Conjoint Board.
- (b) “**General Certification**” is the first certification awarded by a Member Board to approved candidates who meet the requirements for certification in a specified field of medical practice.
- (c) “**Maintenance of Certification/Continuing Certification**” is the recognition by a Primary or Conjoint Board, from time to time, of the continuing qualification of a diplomate and a diplomate’s satisfaction of the requirements of its Maintenance of Certification or Continuing Certification program.
- (d) A “**Primary Board**” is a separately incorporated, financially independent body which determines its own requirements and policies for certification, elects its members in accordance with the procedures

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stipulated in its own bylaws, accepts its candidates for certification from persons who fulfill its stated requirements, administers examinations, and issues certificates to those who voluntarily satisfy its requirements.

(e) “Subspecialty Certification”

- (i) Subspecialty Certification is conferred by one or more Member Boards in a component of a Medical Specialty or Medical Subspecialty; and
- (ii) Subspecialty Certification is authorized to be conferred only to certified physicians or medical specialists who have been certified by one or more Member Board(s) in an area of General Certification.

GENERAL CERTIFICATION AND SUBSPECIALTY CERTIFICATION:

Member Boards may issue general certificates of qualification to physicians and medical specialists in the fields represented by such Member Boards and subspecialty certificates of qualifications to physicians and medical specialists in the fields represented by such Member Boards.

- (a) When approved by the Corporation in accordance with the provisions of Section 7.2 below, a Member Board may issue, alone or in conjunction with another Member Board, certificates to designate qualifications in one or more subspecialty areas of the specialty field represented by that Member Board. When authorized by the Corporation for subspecialty certification, the Member Board may establish subspecialty committees or sub-boards in the approved subspecialty, without further authorization from the Corporation. Subspecialty certification is conferred by one or more Member Boards in a component of the specialty or subspecialty authorized by the Corporation for certification by one or more Member Boards.
- (b) While subspecialty certification is intended to apply primarily to diplomates of the sponsoring Member Board(s), a sponsoring Member Board may accept applicants holding certificates from other Member Boards for examination and subspecialty certification authorized by the Corporation on a case by case basis or by establishing additional pathways to encompass more than one individual. The additional pathways to subspecialty certification must be:
 - (i) endorsed by the Member Board sponsoring the subspecialty certification;
 - (ii) endorsed by the Member Board whose diplomates are being proposed for certification; and
 - (iii) approved by the Board of Directors by a Representational Supermajority Vote.
- (c) Training programs leading to general certification and subspecialty certification must be associated with a residency accredited by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education or equivalent Canadian accredited residency.

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- (d) The program for training required for general certification must be a minimum of three (3) years in duration and subspecialty certification must be a minimum of one (1) year in duration. General certification and subspecialty certification incorporate a specific and identifiable body of knowledge that may include certain procedural skills or practice modes, but must not be limited only to training in a technical skill.
- (e) Approval of any general certification or subspecialty certification must be accomplished by the mechanism and process authorized in Section 7.2. The Member Board(s) seeking authorization to issue general certification or subspecialty certification in a proposed area must provide assurance that the Member Board will conduct an evaluation of the impact and effect of the proposed general certificate or subspecialty certificate on its own general and subspecialty training and practice as well as that of other Member Boards.
- (f) All future applications from the Member Boards for authorization to issue subspecialty certificates will be approved by the Board of Directors by a Representational Supermajority Vote with the name of the subspecialty designation only.

NEW CERTIFICATION, MODIFICATION OF EXISTING TYPES OF CERTIFICATION, OR CHANGE IN NAME:

- (a) Prior approval of the Corporation is required if any Member Board proposes creation of a new type of certification, substantive modification of existing requirements for certification, or change in its name. Intent to submit a proposal for an additional or a new form of certification must be announced to all Members at least six (6) months before the meeting at which the formal proposal will be submitted for a vote. A proposal for such action by a Regular Member may be submitted to the President and CEO at any time. The proposal shall be considered by COCERT, which shall prepare and submit recommendations to the Board of Directors for action. The proposal and the recommendations of COCERT shall be submitted to the Board of Directors for decision by a Representational Supermajority Vote provided,
 - (i) that not less than ninety (90) days prior to the first date of consideration by COCERT or the Board of Directors, whichever date is earliest, each Member shall have been provided with a copy of the proposal and notice that the proposal will be submitted to for decision by the Board of Directors by a Representational Supermajority Vote on a date certain; and
 - (ii) that approval of the proposal shall require Representational Supermajority Vote cast at a regular meeting of the Board of Directors at which a quorum is present.
- (b) A request from a Member Board for a new or modified general certificate or subspecialty certificate must be forwarded to the President and CEO in the form determined by COCERT, with the approval of the Board of Directors.

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- (c) If a Member Board creates a new certification, modifies an existing certification, or changes its name without prior approval of this Corporation, then a grievance may be brought against the Member Board pursuant to these Bylaws.

CHANGE IN CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS:

Except as otherwise set forth in these Bylaws, Primary and Conjoint Boards have the responsibility of establishing their own educational requirements for certification and may change such requirements without being required to submit such change for prior approval of the Corporation; provided that such Primary and Conjoint Boards shall forward to the President and CEO written notice of any change in their certification requirements at least sixty (60) days before the proposed change is to become effective.

CHANGES IN WORDING OF CERTIFICATES:

Any change in the wording on an existing certificate which refers to or names the areas of practice or the areas of training or specialization of the holders of such a certificate shall constitute a substantive modification of an existing type of certificate and shall be subject to the provisions of Section 7.2 of the Bylaws of the Corporation. Any change in an existing certificate shall be submitted to the Membership for information upon approval of such change by the Board of Directors.

CHANGE IN MEMBER STATUS FROM CONJOINT TO PRIMARY BOARD:

A Conjoint Board may submit to the President and Chief Executive Officer an application for a change in membership status to that of Primary Board in a form established by the Board of Directors. The application, when completed, shall be considered by the Board of Directors, together with the summary and recommendations from other appropriate consultant bodies, and submitted to the Board of Directors for approval by a Representational Supermajority Vote. Any such Conjoint Board may seek approval of a change in its membership status to that of Primary Board at any meeting of the Board of Directors at which a quorum is present, provided that not less than one hundred twenty (120) days prior to the meeting each Member and member of the Board of Directors shall have been given a copy of the application together with the written notice of the meeting date. The criteria that will be used in evaluating the application will be determined by the Board of Director, in its discretion.