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American Board of Radiology Implements ‘Continuous Certification’

Along with several other Member Boards of the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS), the American Board of Radiology (ABR) is implementing a new integrated process that links the ongoing validity of certificates to meeting the requirements of Maintenance of Certification (MOC). Under the new process, known as “Continuous Certification,” ABR certificates will no longer have “valid-through” dates. Instead, on each new certificate in diagnostic radiology, radiation oncology, or medical physics, the date of initial certification will be noted and accompanied by the statement that “ongoing certification is contingent upon meeting the requirements of Maintenance of Certification.” This policy change, being implemented in 2012, encourages diplomates to engage in continuous professional development and meet their MOC requirements on time. MOC requirements will not change, but progress will be evaluated on a yearly basis. For each diplomate who is a current enrollee in MOC, Continuous Certification will replace the 10-year MOC cycle.

If for no other professional or personal reasons, keeping current with MOC requirements is important because beginning in spring 2013, ABMS will report on its public website, www.certificationmatters.org, whether or not each ABR diplomate is meeting MOC requirements for each certificate held. Earlier this year, the ABR announced that ABMS public reporting would begin on August 31, 2012. However, the ABR recently requested and received a public reporting deferral from ABMS. This will allow the time needed to verify that the ABR will report each diplomate’s status as accurately as possible.

ABMS has been reporting the MOC status of diplomates of several of its 24 Member Boards since 2011. Soon, the MOC status of every diplomate of all 24 Boards will be reported. The three public reporting categories to be included on the ABMS website are:

- Meeting the requirements of Maintenance of Certification
- Not meeting the requirements of Maintenance of Certification
- Not required to participate in Maintenance of Certification (lifetime-certified diplomates)

The ABMS website will refer users to the ABR website (www.theabr.org), where further information will be found. The ABR’s website is being enhanced to include its own online verification database of our diplomates, which will also be available in spring 2013.

Public reporting of certification and MOC status on the ABMS and ABR websites represents a natural development in the evolving transparency and accountability that are part of ABMS’ Enhanced Public Trust Initiative. It is also in keeping with the ABR’s mission to assure the public that its diplomates have acquired, demonstrated, and maintained a requisite standard of knowledge, skill, understanding, and performance essential to the safe and competent practice of diagnostic radiology, radiation oncology,

and medical physics. Continuous Certification will ensure that public reporting is as clear and accurate as possible.

The ABR Continuous Certification process has many other advantages as well:

- Diplomates with two or more time-limited certificates will be synchronized into one MOC cycle.
- The annual look-back at MOC participation (in March of each year) examines a rolling three-year window, providing diplomates flexibility for how they distribute the credits needed over the three years. The first “full” annual look-back, which includes Parts I, II and IV, will be in March 2016.
- The number of CME credits and SAMs that diplomates may obtain and attest to the ABR per year is unlimited. So, if a diplomate has a year—or even two—in which it is difficult to meet requirements, he or she may obtain and report as many credits as needed in the third year to meet the three-year requirements.
- With the new system, it will be difficult for any individual to fall behind. The ABR will send automatic reminders to help diplomates avoid delay and the stress of trying to meet all their requirements in a very short period of time.
- A diplomate may take the MOC exam at any time and meet the MOC Part III (cognitive expertise) requirement, as long as his/her previous MOC (or certifying) exam was passed no more than 10 years ago.
- During the transition to Continuous Certification, diplomates who have already taken and passed the MOC exam will be given a one-time “break” because the date of their exam passage will be attributed to the last day of their 10-year MOC cycle.
- If diplomates do somehow fall behind and the annual look-back finds them not meeting MOC requirements, a built-in “catch-up” period of one year allows for the time to make up requirements while still being classified as “certified, not meeting the requirements of Maintenance of Certification.” When diplomates make up their requirements, they will again be reported as “meeting the requirements of Maintenance of Certification.” If they have not met requirements after the catch-up year has passed, they will be reported as “not certified.”
- Lifetime-certified diplomates will not lose their certified status but are encouraged to enroll in MOC. They will receive a “letter of MOC enrollment” as soon as they complete the application process. When public reporting begins, they will be reported on the ABMS and ABR websites as “meeting the requirements of MOC.” When they meet their first rolling three-year look-back requirements in March of their fourth year of MOC participation, they will be issued an MOC certificate. Their first look-back for the MOC exam will be in their tenth year.

The ABR is currently preparing more formal and complete information regarding Continuous Certification and wants to be certain that it is accurate and easily understood before placing it on the website. Diplomates have been contacted individually by email and notified of specific ways they will be affected during the transition period. Diplomates also will be notified by email when the new content addressing Continuous Certification is posted on the website. Meanwhile, questions may be directed to the MOC Services Division at abrmocp@theabr.org, or (520) 519-2152.

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Established in 1934, the mission of the American Board of Radiology (ABR) is to serve patients, the public, and the medical profession by certifying that its diplomates have acquired, demonstrated, and maintained a requisite standard of knowledge, skill, and understanding essential to the practice of diagnostic radiology, radiation oncology, and radiologic physics. The ABR is one of 24 Member Boards of the American Board of Medical Specialties.