

Despite a shortage, anecdotal evidence suggests that board certified medical physicists are leaving the field, often to become radiation oncologists or take positions in industry, whereas reverse migration is virtually non-existent. The poor performance on ABR exams (50% correct answers yield a passing score) is another indication of the low desirability of the field to talented individuals. A root cause of the problems is that medical physicists are not part of a profession that is recognized by Federal and State entities (e.g. Medicare) like nurse practitioners, physicians, some social workers, etc. With the recent conversion of CPT physics codes to "delivery codes", recognition is further eroding. To assure adequate patient care, the medical physics profession can no longer depend on the traditionally high public esteem of physics. AAPM needs to accept the current reality and, together with radiation oncologists and other specialists who depend on our expertise, start political lobbying like other medical professions to regain recognition. In the meantime, medical physicists must individually rely on their own skills to justify their admittedly higher income than physics teachers. They must convince hospital administrators that, as compared to the general physics community, they have substantially higher responsibilities, have typically four years of extra training to become boarded, are recognized by ABMS as medical specialists, are working longer hours that include weekends and holidays, and that they bring in many times more money than their cost to the cancer center.