



# TRACERS

Official publication of the American Board of Nuclear Medicine  
A member of the American Board of Medical Specialties

Issue 2  
2017

[www.abnm.org](http://www.abnm.org)



## Message from the MOC Committee Chair *CertLink™ How and Why*

Daniel A Pryma, M.D., MOC Committee Chair

Hopefully all ABNM Diplomates have heard about CertLink™ by now, but if you have not, in short it is a pilot program sponsored by the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS). Its purpose is to potentially replace the Maintenance of Certification (MOC) exam currently required every 10 years for ABNM Diplomates as part of the four part MOC program. While the implementation of MOC has been very controversial, I think all physicians would agree in principle that it is of utmost importance that practicing doctors remain up to date in their skills and knowledge base. While an every-10-years exam does ensure that a physician is up to date at the time of the exam, there are three major problems with this approach:

1. A physician could, in theory, do no learning for 9 years and 50 weeks after their certification or MOC exam then spend two weeks studying frantically for the exam. While this might achieve a passing result, it is certainly not in the spirit of lifelong learning and much of the information covered in that frantic period of studying will be forgotten within hours or days of completing the exam. This physician's patients would not benefit from a practitioner who is truly up to date with the current standard of care despite successful completion of the MOC process.
2. While the MOC exam is a psychometrically valid way to test a physician's knowledge, the examinee leaves the exam with little understanding of what s/he did not know. Even though the final score reports give some feedback on content area performance, this is rarely specific enough to inform future learning to bridge gaps in knowledge.
3. The stakes are high for the MOC exam, with a failing result potentially having significant consequences on a physician's standing and employment. While passing rates for the ABNM MOC exam have been consistently high, this knowledge does little to minimize the stress caused by the process.

The CertLink pilot is designed to address each of these weaknesses with the current program. Participants in the pilot will log into a web-based system to answer questions. On average, there is one question per week, but a great deal of flexibility as to when the questions can be completed (questions are scored on a quarterly basis, so in total 13 questions will be attempted each quarter but they could be completed weekly, all on the first or last day of the quarter or anything in between as best fits any individual's schedule). Questions are timed and most questions allow 2-3 minutes, though some questions might involve large images sets or calculations and will allow for additional time. No question will require more than 5 minutes. Prior to starting the question, the diplomate will be aware of how long that question allows so a choice can be made as to whether to attempt it at that point or wait until later.

Once a question is answered, the diplomate will be shown the correct answer along with an explanation of why that answer is correct, why the other options are incorrect as well as at least one reference should further reading on the subject be desired. Therefore, diplomates are given immediate feedback to reinforce what they know as well as to help learn what is not known. Furthermore, incorrectly answered questions may be re-tested in a subsequent quarter (either the same question or a clone testing the same concept); a correct answer the second time around, evidence of lifelong learning, will negate the prior incorrect response. Finally, because CertLink is a multi-year process and diplomates get real-time feedback on performance, participants can adapt and respond to any difficulties. In order to pass and remain current in ABNM Board Certification, each diplomate must successfully complete the process. However, the process is designed so that physicians can control their own fate through learning and participation throughout the continuous process. No one needs to be in the agonizing position of having to take a challenging high stakes exam and waiting several weeks for results with wide-ranging implications.

The CertLink pilot will be rolled out in two parts and diplomates will receive specific information on the details along with a list of frequently asked questions. For those currently participating in MOC, there is no additional fee for participating in CertLink. Diplomates must be current with annual MOC dues, and pay a one-time \$615 examination fee, which is the same fee paid by diplomates who took the 2017 MOC examination. There will be no examination fee starting January 2019. Diplomates will only have to pay the annual MOC fee, which is currently \$400. Diplomates who have never participated in MOC can participate in CertLink for an annual fee of \$400. Diplomates who find value in the process can opt to satisfy the other requirements to become active in MOC. Those diplomates who never previously participated in MOC who wish to continue to participate in CertLink after January 2019 for re-certification, must pay a one-time examination fee of \$1845 in addition to annual dues. A few words on the fee structure for MOC: during the CertLink pilot, the ABNM will need to add CertLink while still maintaining the current MOC exam. The pilot requires an entirely new platform and question bank with the addition of question explanations. The directors of the ABNM are all volunteers and have been assisted in the CertLink question writing by volunteers from the ACNM. However, the process has real and significant costs. Furthermore, the ABNM is a small board with relatively few diplomates. For comparison, the American Board of Internal Medicine certifies more new diplomates each year than the ABNM has over its entire history. Therefore, the ABNM has a smaller pool of participants across whom to share the costs of the process.

For more information on CertLink please see the dedicated site <https://www.abnm.org/index.php/certlinktm/>.

The ABNM is very excited about this pilot and strongly expects that it will be of value in diplomates' lifelong learning process. Please consider enrolling and encouraging friends and colleagues to do the same.