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ABNM Introduces CertLink

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The American Board of Nuclear Medicine (ABNM) and 6 other member boards of the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) have been working with the ABMS to develop a new platform for longitudinal learning and self-assessment that would give diplomates an alternative to taking a secure examination to fulfill the Part 3 requirement (Assessment of Knowledge, Judgment, and Skills) of Maintenance of Certification (MOC™). The ABNM currently requires diplomates certified since 1992 to pass a secure examination every 10 years as one of the requirements for recertification. The examination includes ;120 multiple-choice questions, each with a single best answer. It is administered over 3.5 hours at Pearson VUE testing centers throughout the United States and in select cities abroad. More than 100 diplomates take the examination each October (136 candidates in 2016). The pass rate is typically 97%. Despite the high pass rate, taking a secure examination causes anxiety among diplomates, who are highly qualified physicians, and is one of the reasons diplomates with lifetime certificates (and some diplomates with time-limited certificates) choose not to participate in MOC. Although most of the questions on the ABNM MOC exam test image interpretation and patient management skills, some questions test simple recall of facts needed for clinical practice. The ABNM recognizes that performance on the MOC examination may not correlate with performance in clinical practice.

Beginning this year, the ABNM will launch a 5-year pilot program called CertLink™. The CertLink programs of the 7 participating ABMS member boards differ slightly to meet the individual needs of their physicians, but all programs will use a common platform that will deliver multiple-choice questions to participating diplomates at regular intervals on any device with Internet access, including cell phones, tablets, laptops, and desktop computers. Diplomates will have a limited time to answer questions, and immediate feedback on their answers will be available. ABNM diplomates who answer a question incorrectly the first time will be given a second opportunity to answer the same or a very similar question (clone) after a few weeks. The repetition reinforces learning acquired in reading the critique that is part of immediate feedback received by diplomates. Not all program details have been finalized. The following summary is provided to introduce the basic pilot program structure to diplomates. A more complete description is available at <https://www.abnm.org/index.php/moc-assessment-initiative/>.

Diplomates whose certificates expire in 2017 must still take the MOC examination. Diplomates whose certificates expire in 2018–2021 who wish to enroll in CertLink to meet MOC Part 3 requirements must enroll in 2017. Diplomates who enroll in 2017 will have the expiration dates of their current certificates extended to 2021. Diplomates who do not enroll will not have the expiration dates of their certificate extended and will need to take the MOC examination prior to expiration of their certificates. Details regarding CertLink enrollment of diplomates whose certificates expire in 2022 are still to be decided. Diplomates with lifetime certificates may also enroll in CertLink. Diplomates with lifetime certificates who do not participate in CertLink and do not take the MOC exam will be listed as “not required to participate in MOC” and will remain certified by the ABNM.

Thirty-six new questions will be introduced each year, 4 in each of the 9 major exam categories (basic science, cardiovascular, endocrine, gastrointestinal, genitourinary, musculoskeletal, neurology, oncology, and pulmonary). Diplomates will be required to respond to 36 new items per year, averaging 9 new items per quarter. If an item is answered incorrectly, a clone may be presented in a subsequent quarter to allow a diplomate another attempt to answer the item correctly. The number of new questions plus clones will not exceed 13 questions per quarter. The frequency of question delivery can be customized by diplomates from one question per week up to 13 questions presented once per quarter. A diplomate may view an item anytime during the quarter in which the item is delivered (shelf-life up to 13 weeks), but a response will be required as soon as the item is viewed.

Performance standards (passing scores) have not been determined but will not be more stringent than current performance standards for the MOC examination. Initial minimum requirements include participation each quarter and answering all 36 new questions per year. These requirements may be modified for circumstances beyond the control of a diplomate. Diplomates will receive periodic reports about their performance no less than quarterly. Diplomates who do not meet performance standards will be able to take the MOC examination for recertification. As an added incentive to participate in CertLink, it is hoped that diplomates will be able to earn American Medical Association Category 1 Continuing Medical Education credit, plus ABNM Self-Assessment Module (SAM) credit, so that a full year of participation in CertLink will also fulfill 1 year of SAM requirements.

The ABNM hopes that diplomates will find CertLink to be an easy and efficient way to meet MOC requirements, as well as a valuable learning and self-assessment tool. Please send your comments and suggestions to abnm@abnm.org.