EDITORIAL

Board Certification: It's Not the Test!

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In this issue I would like to discuss why being Board Certified is more than just passing a test.

First, what does the nonmedical public think about certification? A good place to begin is to look at an Internet site that defines things. One such site is called “about.com.”¹ This site describes a medical “board” as “an organization that doctors become a part of by meeting the requirements for membership.” Please notice that there is no mention of an exam. The organization writes requirements that its applicants must fulfill in order to join. A test usually is part of the requirements, but it is not the sole criterion.

According to the Florida code, section 774.203,² someone who is board certified in internal medicine means a physician who is certified by the American Board of Internal Medicine or the American Osteopathic Board of Internal Medicine. This Florida code agrees with the common definition we have adopted above. Board certification means a physician's being a part of an organization and meeting its requirements.

According to the Virginia Department of Health Professionals,³ to be called board certified, a licensee has met the requirements for certification as defined by the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS), the Bureau of Osteopathic Specialists of the American Osteopathic Association, the American Board of Multiple Specialties in Podiatry, or the Council on Podiatric Medical Education of the American Podiatric Medical Association. This definition expands on the common usage we have been using by defining which organizations the physician must join to use the term board certified. It seems to me to be saying that the organization that the physician becomes a member of must also be recognized in some way as one that is special. So, to expand, to be board certified means that a physician becomes a member of a certain special

organization meets the requirements of that special organization.

What makes the organization special? Let's look at one of those listed by the Virginia Department of Health Professionals.

According to the ABMS, one of the organizations recognized as being special enough to be recognized for board certification,⁴ medical specialty certification is a voluntary process. Medical licensure sets minimum competency requirements and is not specialty specific. The ABMS says board certification is like a “Gold Star”; it demonstrates “exceptional expertise in a particular specialty and/or subspecialty.” Furthermore, “certification by an ABMS Member Board involves a rigorous process of testing and peer evaluation that is designed and administered by specialists in the specific area of medicine.”⁴ In 2006, ABMS's 24 member boards adopted a new gold standard for recertification with a continuous ABMS Maintenance of Certification (MOC) program for all specialties.

OK, my next statement is going to seem redundant, and that is why I am writing in first person, to make a point. The organization is special because it is special. To award a “gold star,” the organization must be the “gold star” of organizations. It is not the test. It is the credibility of the organization.

Board certification means being a member of a specific organization that is accepted as the standard for that specialty or subspecialty and meeting the requirements of that organization. Furthermore, it means meeting the continuous requirements of that organization for recertification. Board certification is not about taking a test. It is about fulfilling the requirements of an accredited (accepted) organization.

How does this relate to wound care? I will rephrase the question. What is board certification in wound care about

now? It means that the organization that wants to become the official organization to designate its members as board certified must become the accepted organization in that specialty. Only then will labeling its members as board certified have any meaning.

So, let's get to work. We need to get on board and make the AAWM the best organization in wound care in terms of quality, education, standards, and so forth. Being part of the ACCWS and creating an indexed, double-blinded, peer-reviewed journal is part of the process. We have joined together to start this process, and we are strong in our conviction to continue.

References

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