



The ABMS 2008-2011 Enhanced Public Trust Initiative The Next Phase for ABMS and its Member Boards

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During the past decade, public trust in the U.S. healthcare system has been tempered by the release of Institute of Medicine reports on patient safety and the quality of healthcare which were highlighted in “To Err is Human” (November 1999) and “Crossing the Quality Chasm” (March 2001). Indeed, the healthcare system in the United States has reached a point where improvement in quality and efficiency has become paramount. It’s a goal that everyone – from the government to private enterprises to healthcare plans – is striving to achieve and many have moved to establish physician and healthcare regulation or evaluation systems.

But this is not the first time we have been faced with the need to reinforce trust in the medical profession and our healthcare system. In the early 1900s, there was a clear need to establish a system that would assure the public that physician specialists were properly trained and that they continued to stay abreast of new practices and treatments to improve the quality of care delivered. To do this, standards for physician education and evaluation had to be established, and a national system had to be created to enforce the standards, also making it possible to readily identify qualified physician specialists. The American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) was born as part of that response to public need for higher quality of care. ABMS is the organization that oversees physician certification in the United States through its 24 Member Boards, which the American Board of Medical Genetics is a member of.

For the past 75 years, ABMS and its Member Boards have been a reliable and trusted resource for consumers and healthcare professionals seeking information on physician qualifications. ABMS and its Member Boards have led the way in providing public assurance of quality healthcare, first by establishing board certification, then recertification and, in recent years, ABMS Maintenance of Certification™ (MOC). Today more than 85 percent of all physicians in the United States are certified by one of more of our Member Boards. We therefore are in an optimal position to be a leading voice in the quality movement, but we cannot do so without first making the public aware of our renewed commitment to ensuring quality. Once again, we find ourselves at a pivotal period that signals change for ABMS and its Member Boards. Consumer expectations have changed, and therefore so must we. Consumers have taken a more active role in their own healthcare decisions and are demanding greater transparency.

To meet these expectations, we must – as a cohesive ABMS Board Enterprise (ABMS and its 24 Member Specialty Boards) – enter into the next phase of healthcare leadership with the public’s interest as our foremost concern. Called the *ABMS 2008-2011 Enhanced Public Trust Initiative*, its goal is to enhance the ABMS Board Enterprise’s role as a trusted private sector agent when it comes to physician accountability and to expand resource offerings for the public’s need.

This is an exciting time for ABMS and its Member Boards as we have the opportunity to collaborate, with public input, to achieve our mission’s goals. In the short time that I have been at ABMS, I have been inspired by the dedication of the board-certified physicians I have worked with and the public’s enthusiasm and desire to be educated healthcare consumers.

With that said, for the Enhanced Public Trust Initiative to succeed, the public's involvement is essential. Their participation, as well as the input of the Member Boards, is crucial as we move forward to meet their expectations for transparent information on physician qualifications. To launch the initiative two task forces will be established, one to examine how ABMS' governance can be more responsive to the need for public transparency in physician accountability. A second task force made up of public and medical professional members will convene to guide the design and implementation of new program initiatives that will strengthen ABMS' offerings as a trusted public agent. The task force will broadly focus on a number of proposed programs that aim to increase public trust, streamline and enhance value in MOC and increase capacity through enhanced activities in national health policy, international program development and the expansion of research activities and performance evaluation.

We will continue to be guided by the knowledge we bring as healthcare professionals, but the task force will help govern our progress with design and implementation of new program initiatives that strengthen our role as a trusted public agent. There are a variety of proposed programs that are under consideration that will be guided by the Enhanced Public Trust Initiative task force and these include:

- Programs and activities to enhance public trust in the Board Enterprise through a/an:
 - Ethics and professionalism task force
 - External relationships workgroup
 - Health and public policy committee and public policy and governmental affairs program
- Programs to streamline and enhance value in MOC through:
 - Learning collaborative on MOC
 - MOC committee with two standing subcommittees (Committee on Oversight and Monitoring of Maintenance of Certification – COMMOC – and Design/Implementation Committee)
 - Shared products and services: CAHPS, maintenance of licensure and physician profile
- Programs to increase capacity in the Board Enterprise through:
 - Expansion of research activities and performance evaluation
 - International program development

Of course, this initiative requires an investment of resources from ABMS and its Member Boards. We regard a potential corresponding increase in board support as a demonstration of your mutual commitment to this process and, in the end, will strengthen the public's trust in the Board Enterprise as the primary leaders and information resources on physician specialist qualifications.

We all share the same fundamental goal – achieving the best possible assurance of high-quality healthcare. This physician-public partnership, as well as a Board Enterprise that unifies the missions of ABMS and all of our Member Boards, is crucial to laying the foundation for our leadership and shared success.

I invite you to learn more about the Enhanced Public Trust Initiative by visiting the ABMS Web site (www.abms.org) and keeping abreast of these exciting times at ABMS.

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