

SNMMI Newsline

ABNM Celebrating 50 Years

George M. Segall, MD – Executive Director, American Board of Nuclear Medicine

Reprinted with Permission J Nucl Med. 2021, 62 (9) 10N

The American Board of Nuclear Medicine (ABNM) is celebrating its first 50 years as a certification board for nuclear medicine physicians. The ABNM was the first conjoint board established under provisions of the “Essentials for Approval of Examining Boards in Medical Specialties” of the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS). It was sponsored by the American Board of Internal Medicine, the American Board of Pathology, the American Board of Radiology, and the Society of Nuclear Medicine. The ABNM was incorporated on July 28, 1971, and had its first meeting on October 23 of the same year. The ABNM became a primary certifying board in 1985 and is currently 1 of 24 member boards of the ABMS.

The ABNM has certified 5,917 physicians since the first certification examination was given in 1972. Certificates issued between 1972 and 1991 were valid for life. There are currently 1,681 active physicians (not retired or deceased) with lifetime certificates. The ABNM began issuing time-limited certificates in 1992. Diplomates initially certified between 1992 to 2017 were required to pass the Maintenance of Certification (MOC) examination every 10 years to maintain certification. There are currently 1,996 active physicians with time-limited certificates. The ABNM introduced CertLink® in 2018, a longitudinal assessment pilot program, as an alternative to the MOC examination. Currently 1,172 diplomates are participating in CertLink, most with certificates expiring prior to 2027. The number of participating diplomates is expected to significantly increase next year, because the ABMS approved CertLink in 2021 as a regular part of the ABNM’s MOC program, and the board will require all ABNM diplomates who do not wish to take the MOC examination for recertification to begin participating in CertLink by January 2022.

CertLink is only a part of the ABNM MOC program. Other parts are professionalism, lifelong learning and self-assessment, and practice improvement. The ABNM has taken several steps to make MOC easier and more valuable for physicians. Diplomates should log onto their profiles on the ABNM website at least once each year to update their information and see the latest news. All 24 ABMS member boards are reevaluating their MOC programs following the report issued by the ABMS *Commission on Continuing Certification: Vision for the Future* (<https://visioninitiative.org/>). The far-reaching report made several recommendations to make

certification a “meaningful, contemporary, and relevant professional development activity for diplomates that ensures they remain up-to-date in their specialty.” The ABMS and member boards have begun a process to implement the recommendations, starting with a revision of the standards that all member boards must follow. The

ABMS board of directors will vote on the final standards in October. The ABNM has already made changes to comply with the recommendations of the ABMS commission and the draft standards, which include adoption of CertLink. One of the potentially most significant impacts of the new standards, if approved, is the adoption of a uniform assessment cycle of 5 years for diplomates of all 24 member boards.

The practice of medicine and health care economics have dramatically changed over the past 50 years, and nuclear medicine has grown to include hybrid imaging, molecular imaging, and theranostics. The ABNM has made significant changes in certification standards to keep up with these and other changes, including support for training leading to dual certification in Nuclear Medicine and Diagnostic Radiology because of the importance of hybrid imaging and revision of the requirements for radionuclide therapy following the approval of several new radiopharmaceuticals for targeted radionuclide therapy. The ABNM has also made significant changes to keep up with society at large, including a process to select new board members that supports diversity, equity, and inclusion, and revision of the leave policy during training to support trainees who need to take medical/parental/caregiver leave. Other challenges remain to be addressed, such as attracting more young professionals into the specialty and maintaining high standards for certification that differentiate a nuclear medicine physician from other specialists doing the same work.

Nuclear medicine has a bright future, and the ABNM is prepared to meet the opportunities and challenges of the next 50 years.

