The 24 member boards of the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) adopted new standards for Continuing Certification on October 29, 2021, that become effective on January 1, 2024. They will replace the previous Standards for the ABMS Program of Maintenance of Certification (MOC) that were revised in 2015.

The new standards support physicians’ continuing professional development, as well as maintain the social contract between the medical profession and the public to improve the quality, safety, and value of health care. The new standards also address the concerns of physicians about single point-in-time, high-stakes recertification examinations, and the requirement for practice improvement activities that did not recognize what physicians were already doing.

The new standards require ABMS member boards to determine at intervals no longer than five years whether a diplomate is meeting continuing certification requirements to retain certification. Currently, boards make recertification decisions anywhere between 3 and 10 years.

The ABNM began issuing time-limited certificates in 1992. Current certificates expire 10 years after their issue date. Diplomates who opt to take the MOC examination are allowed to take the examination up to 2 years before their certificates expire, meaning that diplomates can go 12 years before their next examination.

Medical knowledge and technology advance very rapidly. In the last 5 years, for example, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved 6 diagnostic radiopharmaceuticals and 2 therapeutic radiopharmaceuticals. The 24 ABMS member boards agreed to a uniform recertification cycle of 5 years to assure the public that certification means diplomates are keeping up with advances in their specialties.

Beginning with the ABNM certification examination in October 2025, new diplomates will be issued certificates that expire in 5-years (December 31, 2030). Current diplomates with certificates expiring on December 31, 2025, will receive new certificates that expire in 5 years if they meet all the continuing certification requirements.

The impact of this change on diplomates already participating in CertLink will be minimal. Diplomates participating in CertLink will answer the same number of questions each year. Diplomates who opt to take the recertification examination instead of participating in CertLink will need to pass the examination every 5 years instead of every 10 years to maintain their certification, so they are encouraged to enroll in CertLink after passing their next examination.