

NEW PERSPECTIVES

What's New in Maintenance of Certification

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After almost 20 years of minimal incremental change, the maintenance of certification (MOC) process by the American Board of Internal (ABIM) is in a period of almost explosive change. The pace is at times dizzying. On behalf of the SGIM's MOC Task Force, we want to update our membership on the current state of MOC.

What is MOC?

ABIM was founded in 1936 to “answer a public call to establish more uniform standards for physicians.”¹ MOC was adopted by ABIM in 1990 and explicitly acknowledges that competence at the end of residency (i.e. initial certification) does not automatically equate to competence throughout a doctor's professional career. ABIM feels that MOC represents a physician's “keeping up” with the knowledge and skills of a modern internist.

How long am I certified?

Depending on when you were initially certified, this answer is different:

- If you certified or most recently recertified after 2014, your certification is valid *only as long as you remain current in MOC*.
- If you originally certified from 1990-2013, your certification is valid for 10 years from your certification or most recent recertification.
- If you were initially certified before 1990, you will remain certified indefinitely.
- However, *regardless of the type of certification* you hold, the ABIM website *will also state* whether or not a physician is “participating in MOC.”

What do I need to do to remain current in MOC?

In the past, physicians needed to complete a number of medical knowledge and practice assessment modules at defined intervals. Medical knowledge self-assessment modules were multiple-choice question-based learning activities. These activities were produced by ABIM as well as third parties, including SGIM. Each module was worth a set number of points, which were proportionate to the number of questions asked. A self-reflective examination of a physician's practice, either using a structured tool developed by the ABIM or others, was also required. Finally, a secure computer-based closed-book exam was required every 10 years.

Over the last two and a half years, the landscape has changed.

ABIM has partnered with the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME) to approve certain CME activities for dual credit for MOC points. Many CME activities, including live conferences, journals, and online materials, meet ABIM's criteria for MOC-granting CME. SGIM anticipates that this year's annual meeting will allow for MOC as well as CME. MOC credit for these activities is granted according to the number of CME hours claimed. In addition, it is still possible to gain MOC credit from the “traditional” multiple-choice question modules, either produced by ABIM or other organizations (including SGIM).

In 2015 ABIM put “on hold” the requirement for self-assessment of practice. While physicians can still earn MOC points for completion of practice assessment activities, they are not required through at least December 31, 2018.

ABIM has acknowledged that the “traditional” 10-year secure exam should not remain the only method for MOC assessment. They are currently investigating a variety of strategies, including “open” vs. “closed-book” exams, home or office-based computerized testing, and different intervals (i.e. two or five years). They are planning on an alternative to the 10-year exam by the end of calendar year 2016 with implementation beginning in 2018. It is expected that the traditional 10-year exam will remain an option. Finally, the ABIM has recognized that MOC has a financial cost and has frozen fees through 2017.

Putting this all together in order to remain current in MOC (or remain certified if your certificate was issued in 2014 or later) you must:

- Enroll in MOC and pay required fees;
- Complete at least one MOC activity every two years—this can be CME-based MOC, multiple-choice-question-based MOC, or practice self-assessment;
- Complete 100 points every five years—this is the equivalent of 100 hours of MOC CME; and
- Pass a secure exam every 10 years.

What about recent graduates? Researchers? Educators?

For recent graduates, ABIM gives a one-year MOC program fee waiver for newly certified internists. In addition, ABIM grants an MOC program fee “credit” each year for physicians who successfully complete an ACGME-approved fellowship. Fellows are also granted 20 MOC points for each year of fellowship. No pro-

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gram fee credit or MOC points are awarded for non-ACGME approved fellowships like a GIM fellowship.

ABIM otherwise treats clinically active physicians alike, regardless of their job description. To no small degree this reflects ABIM's obligation to the public. With the increased number of MOC opportunities available through MOC-based CME, it is hoped that we will be able to find more MOC activities relevant to our current practice. A comprehensive list of MOC-CME is available through the ACCME (<http://www.cmefinder.org/>).

What is SGIM's role in MOC?

Although MOC is a program of ABIM, the concept behind MOC—ensuring the public can identify high-quality internists who are “keeping up”—resonates with each of us. ABIM is actively seeking input from both internal medicine specialty societies and internists in general as it reshapes its MOC program. SGIM has provided representation to ABIM in its efforts to “co-create”

a future MOC program that we hope will include robust ongoing self-regulation that the public has confidence in.

In addition to advising Council in this effort, SGIM's MOC Task Force has created three different MOC modules and is working actively with both the Annual Meeting Planning Committee and regions to incorporate MOC into all of our meetings.

What should I do in this rapidly changing landscape?

For many of us, the last thing we wish to do is try to understand a potentially confusing and ever-evolving set of requirements. Given the potential consequences to hospital and insurance credentialing status for lapsed board certification, it is important to not procrastinate in this process. At a minimum:

1. Log in to ABIM's web site (<http://www.abim.org/>). ABIM's portal clearly states your progress under the current rules in effect (Figure 1). If you have questions

about your status contact ABIM at request@abim.org.

2. Make sure to pay required fees and complete some MOC activity every year—this will ensure you remain active in MOC.
3. If your certificate expires before the new MOC assessment is available, plan to fulfill current requirements, including the secure exam.
4. If you have a certificate expiring in 2019 or 2020, pay careful attention to the ABIM's announcements over the next year. It is very likely that you will have flexibility to complete the shorter assessment option.
5. Make sure your voice is heard. Go to <http://transforming.abim.org/>. Read what the ABIM is saying, and fill out the Get Involved form!

References

1. About ABIM. Available at: <http://www.abim.org/about/default.aspx> (accessed on August 5, 2016). SGIM

Figure 1. My MOC Status

