

Assuring Lifelong Learning and Assessing Primary Care Physician Competence

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KEY POINTS:

- Assuring provider competence is a cornerstone of providing high-quality primary care.
- To support population health improvements, physician assessment must move beyond summative evaluation to a process of continuous evaluation and helping clinicians improve clinical practice and care delivery.
- Physicians are intrinsically motivated by timely feedback but only if the measures matter.
- Physicians need help and are mourning the erosion of professional autonomy, angry about meaningless work, and scared about their ability to provide and document value.
- Physician organizations need to use their self-regulatory influences to better craft

The American Board of Family Medicine (ABFM) is one of 24 medical specialty boards that make up the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS). Through ABMS, the boards work together to establish common standards for physicians to achieve and maintain board certification. The boards were founded by their respective specialties to protect the public by assessing and certifying doctors who meet specific educational, training, and professional requirements. Established in 1969, the mission of the ABFM is to improve the health of the public through certification of family physicians and assisting them in maintaining high professional standards through professional development and lifelong learning; setting the standard for board certification training; conducting research on cutting-edge certification methods; and cultivating leaders in family medicine to expand the specialty's contribution to the health of the public.

Dr. Phillips described the ABFM and recent programs implemented and refined in the U.S. to integrate assessment and credentialing into healthcare. The ABFM helps 85,000 physicians maintain their certification and update their knowledge. Certifying boards in the U.S. were established separately from physician membership and advocacy organizations. Therefore, while physician certification boards are an intrinsic part of medical professionalism, the public is their key stakeholder, a different structure than is found in other parts of the world. A decade ago, the 24 boards of the American Board of Medical Specialties committed to moving beyond the summative evaluation of physicians to a process of continuously evaluating and improving the care they deliver. The four-part certification system introduced by ABMS focused on four areas: 1) demonstrating professionalism; 2) continually assessing knowledge and practice; 3) retaking certification tests every seven to 10 years to assure that physician knowledge bases remain up to date; and 4) implementing quality improvement activities within physician practices. Maintenance of certification was not universally embraced by practicing physicians,



many of whom believed that professional competence could be assured by documentation of continuing medical education or other means. The ABFM implemented the changes more slowly than some specialties, and is listening to diplomates and evolving to meet changing needs.

The ABFM is the first certifying board to launch a national registry, PRIME, that is designed to support primary care physician capacity for quality assessment, improvement, data-reporting requirements, and population management in daily practice. It gives providers and practices a dashboard to look at quality measures across their population, dive in deeper to identify patients in the gaps, and recommend quality improvement activities that most align with the gaps. The dashboard feeds continuous certification, and provides data to report for value-based payment. The registry data also supports research, and will allow for an opportunity to redevelop measures, from disease-specific to high-value population health measures.

[VIDEO: Lifelong Learning](#)

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