

Longitudinal Assessment (CertLink): Listening to and Enhancing ABNM Diplomate Experiences

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The American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) member boards are currently examining the maintenance of certification (MOC) process to enhance its value to diplomates. It is exploring alternative methods of assessment in place of the traditional secure examination. This has led to the formation of the CertLink program, in which the American Board of Nuclear Medicine (ABNM) is currently participating in a pilot project. This online learning tool, which uses adult learning theory, has been previously described in Newsline. It quizzes and teaches participating diplomates on a continuous basis at their convenience, requiring only that they answer 9 new questions and up to 4 repeat questions every quarter. We have completed the initial soft launch, which had 135 participants, and have just completed 2 quarters of the hard launch. A total of 527 diplomates are currently participating. Surveys have been conducted at regular intervals, and participating diplomates may fill in “support tickets” if necessary as they complete questions. These tickets are used to report concerns/problems about questions and may include comments, queries about images, queries about Internet and device usage, and reactions. We have received 230 tickets, with 181 answered satisfactorily within 72 hours. Concerns that were reported through this system included user questions/comments (55%), as well as queries about images (6%), computer functionality including browsers (16%), question display or presentation (18%), devices (cell phone, laptop; 2%), and validity of questions (3%). Each ticket is carefully reviewed by ABNM office staff, including, if relevant, the executive director and associate executive director. Tickets are also examined by the ABMS staff.

After completion of the soft launch, ABMS sent in December 2017 a survey to all participating diplomates, which included delivery of 9 questions and lasted for 1 quarter. The purpose was to obtain a basic understanding of diplomates’ overall Internet and device usage, preferred learning methods and resources, customer service needs, and early perspectives on the platform. The ABNM goal is to provide support for continuous improvement of the CertLink user interface and experience. Fifty-eight percent of all diplomates responded to the survey. Sixty-eight percent strongly agreed that they were encouraged that the board is pursuing a longitudinal assessment program as a potential replacement for the proctored exam at a secure testing center. Sixty-one percent would prefer to take a longitudinal assessment program like CertLink over the current every-10-year exam. Eighty-eight percent would strongly recommend the CertLink program to a colleague. Comments received included that the new program is a huge improvement and that it is the best continuing medical education (CME) available for nuclear medicine. Respondents preferred the continuous learning experience and online tutorials for keeping up

to date in the field. A definite preference was reported for this method of learning, with many noting positively that it does not require a brief study crunch followed by a 1-day test. Many respondents liked the immediate follow-up and experiential learning that could lead to improved patient outcomes. Many diplomates also liked the use of technology with which they were comfortable. Respondents reported high usage of Internet resources to stay current. The sample population was highly engaged, used a broad array of medical resources, and was encouraged that CertLink will provide a useful CME alternative. Some respondents were ambivalent about CertLink and would prefer to have the 10-year test or ongoing CME requirements. This was to be expected.

ABNM has simplified its procedures considerably to document participation in all 4 parts of MOC. A complete description of all requirements is available on our website at <https://www.abnm.org/index.php/moc-policy/>. Diplomates must update their profiles each calendar year. We have simplified the process, and staff in the ABNM office are ready to help by e-mail or phone with any difficulties encountered. MOC Part 1—Professional Standing verifies Nuclear Regulatory Commission authorized user status, medical license(s), and current work experience and must be documented annually in profiles. MOC Part 2—Life Long Learning requires 25 CME credits and 8 self-assessment credits annually. Documentation of CME is still required. Diplomates may attest that they have met the requirements but should maintain documentation in case of an audit. Once registered with the CME Gateway, the user profile will show a summary of the cumulative 5-year goal and credits earned through organizations that participate in the CME Gateway. The user profile will also show any additional credits that have been entered. Participants in CertLink may not have to take the MOC Part 3 examination to maintain certification. More flexibility is available in MOC Part 4—Practice Performance Assessment, and many projects and activities performed in daily practice may qualify. To be given credit, participants can check in on the ABNM website and simply attest in their profiles that they are doing a project but should maintain documentation in case of an audit.

The ABNM listens carefully to all diplomates and has learned a lot about their experiences and learning preferences in CertLink and MOC. ABNM will continue to participate actively in CertLink and communicate any changes in the MOC process as they occur.



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