Self-Assessment Modules for Maintenance of Certification

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In March 2000, the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) adopted Maintenance of Certification (MOC) as a framework for assessing continuing competence of all physicians. The ABMS is the umbrella organization for the 24 approved specialty boards in medicine, including the American Board of Pathology (ABP). This MOC process goes beyond traditional 10-year re-certification programs that are mandatory in some specialties but have been voluntary in pathology. Each of the 24 specialty boards, including pathology, has made a commitment to implement the MOC framework in their specialty. ABP began implementation of the process in 2006 with the requirement that all pathologists certified by the ABP in 2006 and beyond must participate in the MOC process. Many experts anticipate that state licensing boards, credentialing agencies, and/or third party payers may eventually require participation in the MOC process for pathologists certified prior to 2006.

Beginning January 1, 2006, all primary and subspecialty certificates issued by the ABP are time-limited and expire 10 years after being issued. The MOC program is divided into 4 components: Part I, Professional Standing; Part II, Lifelong Learning and Self-Assessment; Part III, Cognitive Expertise; and Part IV, Evaluation of Performance in Practice. Participants must satisfactorily complete all of these components. To maintain certification in a specialty or subspecialty, pathologists are required to successfully meet MOC requirements no later than 10 years after an initial certificate is awarded, and some components have deadlines that must be met within the 10-year cycle (e.g., yearly continuing medical education [CME] hour requirements). Participants can elect to maintain certification in a primary area(s) (anatomic pathology and/or clinical pathology) only or in combination with a subspecialty, or maintain certification in a subspecialty area only. Further information on MOC can be found at the ABP website (http://www.abpath.org) or the ABMS website (http://www.abms.org).

The College of American Pathologists (CAP) has been working with ABP to provide education activities that will meet MOC requirements. Recently, the CAP was approved by the ABP to provide Self-Assessment Modules (SAM) in partial completion of Part II MOC requirements. This has been an important objective of the CAP President and Board of Governors, as well as the CAP’s Education Department and Education Committee. The ABP has specified that all pathologists participating in the MOC process must earn at least 35 Category 1 CME credits each year. Of these 35 CME credits, 10 must be earned through completion of SAM. Self-assessment programs must addres knowledge in a particular area or review specific medical literature and must include a self-administered examination for which the participant must meet a minimum performance level.

I am pleased to announce that the April Test Your Memory activity (A Re-view of Articles From Last Month’s Archives of Pathology & Laboratory Medicine, page 656) will be the first CAP education activity that is eligible to be used as a SAM for board-certified pathologists who must participate in the ABP Maintenance of Certification program. The questions for this first activity come from articles in the Diagnostic Problems in Anatomic Pathology special section that appeared in the March 2007 issue of the Archives. This special section was organized by Kevin Leslie, MD, of the Mayo Clinic, Scottsdale, Ariz. Proposed questions were submitted by the authors of the special section articles, were reviewed by Dr. Leslie and me, and then further refined by CAP Education staff.

The Test Your Memory activity will still provide CME credit. Pathologists will be able to choose whether they want to designate their CME as part of the SAM requirement or as regular CME credit. The Archives Test Your Memory activity is expected to be the first of a number of Self-Assessment Modules developed by the CAP in 2007. The process for completing this month’s Test Your Memory activity will be identical to previous issues with the exception that a passing score will be determined and individual pathologists will receive a score based upon their responses. The scoring is being included in order to meet stated ABP requirements for successful completion of Self-Assessment Modules.

Gradually, Archives will incorporate SAM into the Test Your Memory program on a regular basis. We are pleased to serve our readers with this opportunity.