

ABMS Updates Standards for Quality, Safety

BY ALICIA AULT

NEW ORLEANS — The American Board of Medical Specialties has approved standards for its maintenance of certification program, emphasizing public disclosure and evidence-based continuing medical education, said Dr. Richard E. Hawkins, ABMS senior vice president for professional and scientific affairs.

As part of maintenance of certification

(MOC), physicians will now have to show evidence of participation in practice-based assessment and quality improvement every 2-5 years. The ABMS is urging physicians to use nationally approved measures such as those endorsed by the National Quality Forum. By 2011, all 24 ABMS member boards will have to show that diplomates meet these requirements.

At that time, the ABMS will let the public see which physicians are participating

in the MOC process, most likely via a Web site, Dr. Hawkins said in an interview.

Dr. Hawkins described the actions taken by the ABMS Board of Directors in a presentation during the annual meeting of the Society of Gynecologic Surgeons. The board voted to require all physicians to complete a patient safety self-assessment program at least once during each MOC cycle, starting in 2010. Because ABMS member boards are at different

stages of implementing MOC, some may not be equipped to start requiring this of their diplomates, Dr. Hawkins said. Thus, the ABMS dubbed the program a “developmental standard” and will reevaluate it during the next 5 years.

The ABMS will make modifications, if necessary, Dr. Hawkins said. Even so, the ABMS standards require this module to be in place for all diplomates by 2014.

The board also approved another pilot standard: Starting in 2010, physicians who provide direct patient care will be required to demonstrate communication skills using patient surveys with the Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems instrument, or an equivalent survey that’s judged acceptable. The goal is to have the program in place by 2014, he said.

Similarly, the developmental standard on peer surveys—requiring physicians to participate starting in 2012—will be implemented by member boards at their own pace, but will still be expected by 2014. Both of these survey requirements will be evaluated and updated as necessary during the next 5 years.

Since physicians currently have to report quality data and process improvement to various agencies, the ABMS is working on ways to streamline data collection and reporting for MOC, Dr. Hawkins said. ■

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Gov. Sebelius Confirmed as New HHS Head

President Obama now has a Health and Human Services secretary to help shepherd his health reform agenda through Congress and deal with the swine flu outbreak and other challenges.

In a 65-31 vote, the Senate confirmed Kansas Gov. Kathleen Sebelius, a Democrat, as HHS secretary on April 28. Under an agreement reached between Senate Democrats and Republicans, 60 votes were required for confirmation. She is the last member of President Obama's cabinet to be confirmed by the Senate.

Gov. Sebelius, a two-term governor and former state insurance commissioner, has been praised for her bipartisan approach to governing in Kansas. Her confirmation was initially slowed in the Senate over conservatives' concerns about her position on abortion. For example, anti-abortion advocates called her unfit for the HHS post after her April 23 veto of controversial state legislation that would have increased reporting requirements on late-term abortions and left physicians who perform abortions open to civil litigation if the abortion was later deemed illegal.

The American Medical Association praised Gov. Sebelius for her work to expand health coverage to children in Kansas, and for her role in blocking a major insurance merger in her state.

—Mary Ellen Schneider