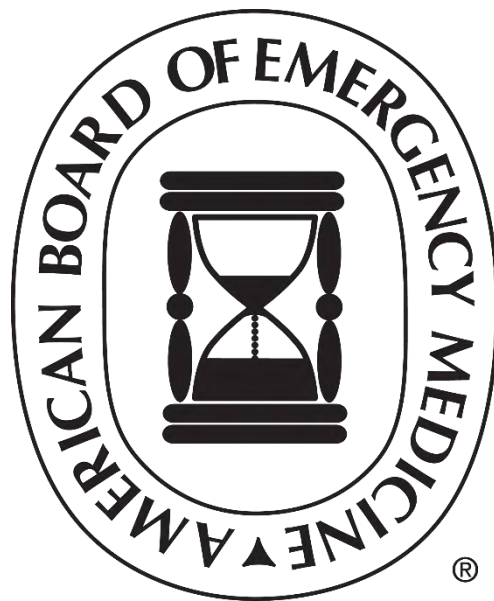


American Board of Emergency Medicine

Report to the 2020 American College of Emergency Physicians Council



October 2020

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Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide the 2020 ACEP Council an overview of the various changes to ABEM certification.

General

ABEM is revising continuing certification to improve learning opportunities and decrease the high-stakes nature of certification. These revisions provide an additional advantage in accelerating knowledge translation in our specialty in a novel way. ABEM has changed its certification program in response to physician requests and feedback. The most recent iteration of its certification program is the culmination of a deliberate, specialty-centric development process that integrated substantial physician input. ABEM has continuously been revising its certification program to meet the needs of the physician, the specialty, and the public (Attachment 1). As Attachment 1 demonstrates, ABEM certification has been constantly evolving.

ABEM acknowledges that although many physicians welcome this latest evolution in certification, there are some physicians who would prefer that no change be made. ABEM has attempted to optimize fairness and consistency in this transition. Unfortunately, granting the exceptions requested by some physicians could create greater inconsistencies and threaten the balance and fairness that ABEM has designed.

The changes to ABEM's certification program reduce the number of requirements needed to stay certified. In addition, the revised program should reduce stress by eliminating the high-stakes ConCert Examination. Nonetheless, uncertainty about an individual physician's requirements and misperceptions about the implications of the changes create a sense of complexity. ABEM is pleased to assist physicians with understanding their requirements as a result of this transition. To help physicians understand their requirements, ABEM designed a new tool, [✓ ABEM Regs](#), which is available on the ABEM website. This easy-to-use feature allows physicians to view their certification requirements based on when their current board certification expires.

ABEM certification signifies that a physician has met rigorous standards. ABEM certification is highly regarded and has value as a credential. ABEM, working with ACEP and other Emergency Medicine organizations, has been able to leverage the strength of ABEM certification to eliminate several medical merit badge requirements. Others view ABEM certification as proof that a physician has demonstrated up-to-date knowledge in the specialty.

ABEM has always required recertification since the inception of the specialty—this is a source of pride for the specialty. Throughout its history, ABEM has been consistent and fair in the manner in which it administers certification. By granting exceptions during the phase-in process, ABEM would create complex subgroups with differing formats of certification for physicians, which would undercut the consistency and rigorous application of national standards.

The phase-in process is designed to provide ABEM-certified physicians access to MyEMCert quickly to shorten the transition and create uniformity in physicians' certification requirements. Given the need to transition ABEM certification to a more continuous process, ABEM will allow recertification to occur via MyEMCert two years earlier than ABEM initially projected. As recently as the 2019 Council meeting, ABEM announced that the earliest year a physician could become recertified using MyEMCert would be 2022, and that it would require completing eight MyEMCert modules in two years. By transitioning to a 5-year certification cycle, ABEM is able to offer recertification using MyEMCert sooner.

Key Elements

Gathering Your Ideas

Prior to the latest changes to certification, ABEM solicited extensive feedback from physicians. ABEM conducted a nationwide summit of all major organizations, including ACEP. ACEP was represented by (now) ABEM President, William P. Jaquis, M.D., and (then) Executive Director, Dean Wilkerson, M.B.A., J.D., CAE. ABEM also conducted focus groups with the majority of ACEP state chapters. Finally, ABEM sent a survey to 36,000 ABEM-certified physicians, 12,800 of whom responded.

Responsive to Unique Needs

The program responds to the unique needs of emergency physicians. Emergency physicians are different—we work extremely varied schedules and 365 days of the year. The program addresses the need for flexibility and making staying certified easier. Emergency physicians are also exposed to a wider range of patient conditions than most other specialties. The new program considers the tremendous breadth of knowledge emergency physicians are expected to understand. MyEMCert will accelerate the translation of knowledge in the specialty in a way that is unique to Emergency Medicine.

Custom Built to Physician Feedback

ABEM redesigned this program based on emergency physician feedback. Physicians wanted MyEMCert to start as soon as possible—ABEM found a way. As mentioned above, beginning in spring 2021, ABEM-certified physicians will have the option of fulfilling continuing certification requirements by completing four MyEMCert modules (online and open book) in lieu of the ConCert Exam. A [short video](#) describing MyEMCert modules is available on the ABEM website. The ConCert Exam will no longer be available after 2022.

The switch to MyEMCert prioritizes relevant content, saves emergency physicians time and money, and better accommodates their schedules. Starting in 2021, ABEM will move to five-year certification and implement an annual fee structure. The move from 10-year to 5-year certification—while simultaneously moving to an annual fee structure—does not come with any increased fees and *actually decreases the number of required activities and indirect costs* (see FAQ #13 in Attachment 2).

Flexibility

As mentioned before, emergency physicians often work nontraditional office hours. MyEMCert gives emergency physicians the flexibility to answer questions at a time and in a setting of their choosing.

Commonly Asked Questions

Physicians will have questions about any change. The following questions have been the most common. ABEM wishes to clarify misconceptions that may help physicians be more at ease with this transition.

1. I recently passed the ConCert exam and thought my certification was good for 10 years. Why isn't it?

Recertification is not exclusively linked to ConCert. ConCert is only one of 12 requirements during a 10-year certification. When certification is renewed is not linked to when you pass the ConCert, but when your current certification expires. Passing the ConCert Exam means that you completed one requirement to become recertified.

2. I was planning to retire in less than ten years. What exception can be made so that I do not need to retake the exam prior to my retirement?

In order to ensure consistency and fairness, ABEM cannot make any exceptions to certification requirements and certification lengths. Every physician will be transitioned to the new certification process with their next period of recertification, whenever that may be.

3. Why wasn't I informed of the change to the five-year certification before I took the ConCert Exam?

ABEM has communicated the continuing certification process and resulting requirements as promptly as possible. ABEM completed and approved the new continuing certification program on July 23, 2020, and shared the information within six business days. The Board went through a meticulous process to revamp its continuous certification process to better meet the unique needs of emergency physicians. So far, the overall response from ABEM-certified physicians has been positive.

4. Why is my certification period being shortened?

ABEM is not shortening the period of certification for any physician. ABEM is honoring the end date of every certificate it has already issued.

For additional FAQs, see Attachment 2.

ABEM Certification: A Constant Evolution

Introduction

ABEM has had some form of continuing certification since it was approved in 1979 as the 23rd American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS)–recognized medical specialty board. Over time, continuing certification has evolved due to two main factors: 1) requirements emanating from the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS); and 2) physician suggestions.

Recertification

ABEM has always required recertification. Recertification was initially based on meeting ABEM medical licensure requirements and passing a recertification examination. The first ABEM multiple choice question recertification examination was administered over 30 years ago (1989).

Maintenance of Certification (MOC)

The seminal report *To Err is Human*, published by the Institute of Medicine in 1999, prompted the ABMS to determine that lifetime certification based on a single examination was felt to be insufficient assurance of physician competency. Recognizing the need to show constant involvement in activities that demonstrate learning and improved patient care, the ABMS introduced its MOC program in 2000. Each member board agreed to develop an MOC program that followed a four-part design including these components:

- Professional Standing (later changed to Professionalism and Professional Standing)
- Lifelong Learning and Self-Assessment
- Assessment of Cognitive Expertise (later changed to Assessment of Knowledge, Judgment, and Skills)
- Assessment of Practice Performance (later changed to Improvement in Medical Practice).

The ABEM MOC Program 2004 – 2020

When the ABMS decided that all member boards would implement an MOC program, ABEM created a program that:

- Transitioned the “recertification” examination to the Continuous Certification (ConCert) Examination. ConCert introduced improvements to the recertification exam including:
 - ConCert was computer based
 - It was offered over a one-week period each year, providing physicians with greater flexibility in scheduling
 - ConCert was administered in professional testing centers located throughout the United States and Canada, reducing physician travel time and costs
- Introduced the LLSA, which involved reading articles and taking an online, open-book test.
- Added the Improvement in Medical Practice (IMP) component, which was designed to recognize practice improvement efforts in which emergency physicians were already engaged. IMP involved attesting to completion of a quality improvement effort using a plan-do-study-act (PDSA)–like cycle. Initially, it also included periodic participation in a Patient Experience of Care Survey.

- Enhanced the professional standing component to be continuous, rather than required once every ten years.

Continuous Improvement

Since the inception of the ABEM MOC program, ABEM has constantly refined the requirements and improved the activities available for physicians to meet requirements. The ABEM Continuing Certification Committee meets every six months and examines every aspect of continuing certification. ABEM frequently receives feedback from certified physicians via multiple avenues.

Since its implementation in 2004, ABEM has made several modifications to ABEM Continuing Certification (modifications listed below).

Continuing Certification 2020

Changes to continuing certification, both implemented and planned for implementation in 2021 include:

- MyEMCert. Core elements of MyEMCert include:
 - Online, open-book modules
 - Modules are topic specific
 - Immediate feedback, providing scores, correct answers, and rationales
 - Content that keeps physicians informed about key advances in the specialty
- Five-year certification period
 - Begins in 2021 with all newly issued certificates
- Annual fee begins in 2021
 - Approximately the same cost as currently paid on an annualized basis
 - Physicians who have paid more than the annualized amount will receive a refund
 - Begins with all newly issued certificates
- Transitional ConCert
 - Online
 - Open book (UpToDate® available as a resource)
 - Taken alone
 - Available twice per year through 2022, when ConCert will be discontinued

Modifications to ABEM Continuing Certification (2004 – 2019)


- ABEM originally planned to base up to 40 percent of ConCert's content on LLSA readings, on the grounds that certified physicians would then have a significant head start when preparing to take the examination. However, physicians felt that this would quickly become an unmanageable burden. They would have to study material from up to ten previous LLSA tests based on as many as 200 articles. In response, ABEM removed the link between designated LLSA readings and ConCert questions.
- Starting with the 2009 LLSA test, the number of test questions was reduced from 40 to 20-30, based on concerns physicians expressed about the time and effort needed to prepare for and take the tests.
- Examinees who took the ConCert reported that they felt rushed to complete the exam. Scheduled breaks were not provided during the four hours of the exam. In 2009, the examination was split into two separately timed sections to allow adequate break time.

- The number of annual LLSA readings was reduced from 16-20 to 10-15 in 2010, based in part on concerns physicians expressed about the effort needed to review the articles.
- Physicians were able to take LLSAs in the year in which they become certified or renew certification starting in 2011. This allowed physicians to take an LLSA each year during the certification cycle.
- The Practice Improvement (PI) requirement of the Improvement in Medical Practice (IMP) component of MOC was modified in 2011 to include an exception to the rule that the pre-measurement and post-measurement required for an improvement activity must include at least ten of the physician's patients. The exception allowed diplomates to include fewer of their patients in each measurement involving low-frequency, high-acuity conditions.
- Starting in 2011, options for physicians to regain certification were simplified. Specifically, formerly certified physicians who missed a small number of requirements could regain certification by making up missed requirements within five years. If more than five years had passed after their certification expired, or if too many requirements were missed, the physician would be required to pass the ConCert and Oral Certification examinations to regain certification.
- In 2011, ABEM, in conjunction with ACEP and AAEM, began offering CME credit for successfully completing an LLSA test.
- Starting in 2012, ABEM implemented a five-business day "grace period" for completing recertification requirements. Although certificates still expire on December 31, ABEM does not convert certificates to expired status for not having met all continuing certification requirements until after the grace period ends. In 2016, the grace period was extended to ten business days.
- The frequency with which certified physicians were required to report and verify their medical licensure was reduced from every time they initiated action within the MOC website to every six months. This change was implemented in late 2013.
- The requirement that physicians complete their required LLSA tests prior to registering for ConCert was eliminated in 2013.
- Previously, passing ConCert immediately renewed a physician's certification, which "reset" the certification date. If a physician took the examination sooner than the tenth year of certification, they would have paid the full price of certification for an abbreviated duration. In 2013, a change was implemented that allows physicians to take the exam up to five years before their certification expiration date. These changes removed the financial disincentive to take the exam early, with the result that an increasing number of physicians have taken the exam one or two years early to ensure that they have time to retake it, if necessary, before their certification expires.
- Originally, each year's LLSA was based primarily on designated topic areas of the EM Model for that year. The list of topics was intended to recycle every nine years. It became a challenge to find a sufficient number of high-quality articles on designated topics each year. ABEM recognized that there might be more current, important articles published in any given year. Starting with the 2014 LLSA, the annual readings come from all areas of the EM Model.
- The requirement that certified physicians complete an average of eight self-assessment CME credits per year was removed in 2016. Participating in learning activities that include a self-assessment dimension is still important. However, physicians meet this goal just by completing their required ABEM LLSAs, all of which meet the definition of a self-assessment activity.

- More options for meeting the ABEM LLSA requirement were offered to physicians starting in 2016, when EMS and Medical Toxicology LLSAs were made available to all ABEM-certified physicians. In June 2017, a Pediatric Emergency Medicine LLSA also became available.
- Starting with the 2017 EM LLSA, ABEM began providing specific rationales for each test question once the physician passed the test. This change is intended to enhance the value of ABEM LLSA tests as learning activities.
- The patient safety LLSA requirement was removed in 2017. Patient safety material is included in regular ABEM LLSAs, so a specific requirement was no longer needed.
- In 2019, ABEM removed the requirement that certified physicians participate in a patient experience of care survey (the Communication / Professionalism (C/P) requirement of the IMP component). Physician feedback was one of the drivers of this change.

5-Year Continuing Certification Cycle and Annual Fee

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

1. How long is the current certification period? Your current certification will remain valid until the expiration date on your certificate. Starting in 2021, after your current certification expires, when you renew your certification, you will be issued a certificate that will be valid for 5 years. This takes place after your current certification expiration date, not necessarily in 2021. Starting in 2021 physicians who receive initial certification will also receive a certificate that is valid for a 5-year period.
2. Why did ABEM change the certification cycle from a 10-year to a 5-year certification cycle? A number of factors contributed to the decision to change the certification cycle.
 - Instituting the 5-year cycle with the launch of MyEMCert and the annual fee will minimize the number of disruptions and help to simplify the continuing certification process. Five-year certification cycles foster a more continuous approach to keeping up with medical knowledge and key advances in the specialty and demonstrating ability to meet certification standards.
 - Public and patient groups do not view the 10-year certification process as sufficient for certification. They assume certification programs are much shorter.
 - The ABMS Vision Commission report recommends moving to a continuing certification process. A 5-year cycle, while not continuous, moves in the direction of continuing certification.
 - Changing to a 5-year cycle now allows physicians with certifications expiring in 2021 to recertify using MyEMCert. Previously, this group was not allowed because they would have had to complete more MyEMCert modules than would be available.
3. Will the date my current certification expires change now that there is a 5-year certification cycle? No. All current board certification expiration dates remain the same. Beginning in 2021, when you next renew your certification, you will be issued a 5-year certificate. This takes place after your current certification expiration date.
4. I am confused about what my options are for renewing certification. What should I do? To check what activities you need to complete to renew your certification, please use the [✓ ABEM Reqs](#) tool in the Stay Certified section of the ABEM website. Enter your certification end date to view your requirements. If you still have questions, please contact ABEM at staycertified@abem.org or call 517.332.4800. 
5. If my current ABEM certification expires in 2021 or after, and I choose to take ConCert a year early, in 2020, will my board certification be renewed for 10 years? No. Taking ConCert does not in itself renew certification. Certification renewal is based on the expiration date of your current certificate. If your current certification expires after 2020, if you have met all of your requirements, your certification will be renewed for 5 years.
6. Is there a difference between renewing my certification by taking ConCert versus completing MyEMCert modules? No. If you complete your requirements by your

certification expiration date, your board certification will be renewed for 5 years, regardless of which method you use. Please use the [✓ ABEM Reqs](#) tool in the Stay Certified section of the ABEM website.

7. My board certification expires after 2021, and I already took ConCert; will my certification be renewed for 10 years? No. If you have completed all of your continuing certification requirements, your board certification will remain unchanged from when it was originally issued and in effect until the expiration date. Your board certification will then be renewed for 5 years. Please use the [✓ ABEM Reqs](#) tool in the Stay Certified section of the ABEM website to see what your requirements are.
8. My board certification expires at the end of 2020. If I take ConCert and complete all of my other requirements, will my board certification be renewed for 10 years? Yes. The move to a 5-year certification cycle goes into effect for physicians whose board certification expires in 2021 and after. If you pass ConCert and complete all of your requirements by your requirement date (June 30, 2021), you will be issued a 10-year certificate. You will move to the 5-year certification cycle the next time you renew your certification.
9. I thought that if I took ConCert, my new certificate would be for valid for 10 years; why not? By taking ConCert—no matter when your certification ends—to renew your certification, you are completing only one of several requirements needed to renew your certification; passing ConCert does not issue you a new certificate. ABEM offered the option to take ConCert early to reduce test anxiety and decertification risk caused by having to take the exam in the last year of certification. To renew your current board certification, over a 10-year period, you must have:
 - A medical license in compliance with ABEM policy
 - Attested to 2 IMP activities
 - Completed 8 LLSAs
 - Passed ConCert (or complete 4 MyEMCert modules).

Passing ConCert does not renew your certification; meeting all requirements by the end of your certification period renews your certification.

Beginning with certifications that expire in 2021, board certification will be renewed for 5 years after your current board certification expiration date, even if you passed ConCert early. Please use the [✓ ABEM Reqs](#) tool in the Stay Certified section of the ABEM website to see what your requirements are.

10. How long will I have to be able to use ConCert to renew my certification? ConCert will be available through 2022. If your certification expiration date is in 2026 or earlier you can take ConCert to renew your certification because you are allowed to take ConCert anytime during the last 5 years of your certification cycle. Also, when your current certification expires, you will be issued a certificate that will be valid for 5 years. Please use the [✓ ABEM Reqs](#) tool in the Stay Certified section of the ABEM website to see your requirement options.
11. Why is ABEM discontinuing ConCert as an option to renew certification? A June 2018 survey of all ABEM-certified physicians showed that over 90 percent of physicians would prefer to recertify using MyEMCert, not ConCert. Maintaining both MyEMCert and ConCert would divert ABEM resources and result in higher certification costs for all physicians. Therefore, ConCert will be discontinued after 2022.

12. My certification expires in 2027; do I have to wait until the second five years of my current certification to take MyEMCert modules? **No.** Physicians with certificates that expire between 2027-2029 can take MyEMCert modules in place of LLSAs to meet their first 5-year requirements.
13. Did certification requirements increase with the change to a 5-year certification cycle? **No.** To obtain a 10-year certificate, physicians were required to:
- Complete 8 LLSAs
 - ConCert
 - 2 IMP attestations
 - Maintain all medical licenses in compliance with ABEM policy

With the new 5-year certification cycle, physicians complete one less requirement. They must:

- Complete 4 MyEMCert modules
- 1 IMP attestation
- Maintain all medical licenses in compliance with ABEM policy

The MyEMCert, 5-year certification cycle eliminates the high-stakes, secure ConCert Exam from total requirements. Please refer to the table below.

Comparison Between 10-Year and New 5-Year Certification Cycles

	10-Year Certification	5-Year Certification
Annual Costs	\$280/annualized	\$280/year
LLSA Fee	\$105	Free
ConCert Fee*	\$1,950	\$0
Total Fees	\$2,790	\$1,400
Requirements	Four activities every five years	Four activities every five years
Licensure and Improvement in Medical Practice	Yes	Yes
Consistent Year-to-Year Physician Fees	No	Yes
Periodic High-Stakes Examination (ConCert)	Yes	No
Travel to a Testing Site	Yes	No

NOTE: 5-year certification does not start until current certification expires.

* ConCert will be available in 2021 and 2022 for \$1,400 for those who delay enrolling in MyEMCert.



5-year recertification does not start until your current certification expires.

14. Will the way I pay for continuing certification change? **Yes.** For physicians who renew certification or achieve initial certification in 2021, an annual fee structure will be implemented. All ABEM-certified physicians will move to an annual fee at the same time

they move to a 5-year certification cycle (after they next renew their certification). Rather than having to pay the ConCert fee up front plus costs for LLSA tests, physicians will pay an annual fee of \$280, which spreads payments evenly over the certification cycle. This is virtually the same amount as physicians are now paying for continuing certification.

15. Is the change to MyEMCert and the annual fee going to provide a financial windfall for ABEM? No. ABEM-certified physicians currently pay an annual average of about \$280 per year for continuing certification requirements (8 x \$105 for LLSAs + \$1,950 for ConCert = \$2,790 ÷ 10 = \$279 per year). The new annual fee will be \$280 per year, which is nearly the same as total current costs for continuing certification. Those who took ConCert early and paid the \$1,950 fee will be receiving a refund check for the difference between the old fees and the new fees during this transition. Refer to the table in FAQ 13 for details. Please note: Refunds apply only to fees paid for successful completion of the ConCert Exam and LLSA tests; they will not apply to fees paid for retaking exams or for late fees.

16. I took ConCert early and the fees I paid are more than the fees for MyEMCert modules. This looks like a way for ABEM to make more money. If you paid the ConCert fee under the old fee structure, ABEM will be sending you a check reimbursing you for the difference in payments. Please note: Refunds apply only to fees paid for successful completion of the ConCert Exam and LLSA tests; they will not apply to fees paid for retaking exams or for any late fees.