



## Maintenance of Certification

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### Keywords

- Maintenance of certification • Continuous professional development
- Board certification • Medical education

### Key points

- Maintenance of Certification represents a standard for continuous professional development.
- The American Board of Surgery is responsible for defining the educational and practice standards that allow surgeons to be eligible for certification and maintaining their certification.
- The 4 components of Maintenance of Certification are based on the 6 professional competencies developed by the American Board of Medical Specialties and Accreditation Council on Graduate Medical Education.
- Participation in Maintenance of Certification demonstrates to the public and the profession your ongoing commitment to meet the standards for contemporary practice and to improve care.

### BACKGROUND

Board certification in the United States began in 1916 with establishment of the American Board of Ophthalmology. Additional boards were founded over subsequent decades to recognize physicians who had developed specialized skills based in their training or experience. Each board defined the education and practice standards that allowed physicians to be eligible for certification.

The American Board of Surgery (ABS) was founded in 1937 through a joint effort of the American Surgical Association, American Medical Association, American College of Surgeons, and prominent regional surgical societies of that time. Its initial intent was to develop a process that would result in

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The author has nothing to disclose.

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certification of individuals who met a defined standard of education, training, knowledge, and clinical judgment in surgery (Box 1).

The impetus for creation of the ABS was “to protect the public and improve the specialty.” Assessment of knowledge and judgment through a rigorous examination process differentiated board certification from membership in professional organizations. The ABS was organized in accordance with guidelines of the Advisory Board of Medical Specialties. This organization later became the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS), which serves as the oversight body for its member boards and assures the public that its member boards meet common standards for initial certification and maintenance of certification (MOC).

In its mission statement, the ABS emphasizes that its primary purpose is to serve the public (Box 2).

Setting standards for board certification is a privilege of self-regulation that has been granted to the profession of medicine and its specialties by the American public. In return for this trust, the ABS and other boards must commit to serve the best interests of the public through our certification processes and requirements.

Certification by the ABS is based on education, evaluation, and assessment. Appropriate undergraduate medical education, accredited surgical residency training, a broad operative experience, and high ethical standing comprise the essential requirements for certification. As additional specialties have evolved within the ABS, each has developed a certification process using these elements as a framework. The ABS is composed of 7 surgical specialties (Box 3).

Pediatric surgery, vascular surgery, surgical critical care, and complex general surgical oncology have component boards, which are charged to establish the standards for certification and MOC in its discipline. There are several different committees that perform these functions for general surgery. In addition, there are 2 advisory councils within the ABS that represent non-board certified disciplines (transplantation, gastrointestinal surgery) as well as the General Surgery Advisory Council. Through its board of directors, component boards, and advisory councils, the ABS has representation from 39 different surgical societies as well as 3 at large members and one public member.

### **Box 1: Purposes of the American Board of Surgery**

- To conduct examinations of acceptable candidates who seek certification or maintenance of certification by the board
- To issue certificates to all candidates meeting the board’s requirements and satisfactorily completing its prescribed examinations
- To improve and broaden the opportunities for graduate education and training of surgeons

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