



Heading Towards a Century

Five years ago as the incoming executive director of the ABPD, I wrote an article entitled “Pearls from the Past, Visions for the Future”. Since then, ABPD has wrapped up its strategic plan, has continued to see increasing interest from candidates for board certification with more and more applicants, and has had some noteworthy, but planned staff changes and a relocation of office headquarters to Nashville, Tennessee. Significant events indeed, however much more monumental is the strategic change that the Board of Directors is implementing as they move towards some of the points made 5 years ago. Specifically, they are looking at continued competency and enhancing health outcomes for our patients.

As a corollary, in 2016 the American Board of Ophthalmology, the very first board certification body in the United States, celebrated their 100th anniversary and published a whole series of articles about board certification in their American Academy of Ophthalmology journal. These articles are an extremely good read and can help us as we look to improve board certification in pediatric dentistry. Ophthalmology was the first in a group of boards that founded or later joined what is now the American Board of Medical Specialties; 24 member boards now belong, with 840,000 physicians certified by at least one board and over 80% of United States physicians are ABMS board-certified.

The article written by Nora et al., entitled "Board Certification: Going Back to the Future" looked at three specific years representing the past (1916 and 1976) and future (2036) of medical board certification. From 1916, where standards for medical education were largely nonexistent and medical schools were no more than diploma mills, to 1976, when healthcare delivery moved from patients' homes to physicians' offices and hospitals, and where extraordinary scientific, pharmacologic, and engineering advances expanded availability of diagnostic and therapeutic interventions. Also in 1976 medical specialization became the norm and 16,000 physicians were newly certified. The article goes on to predict that the world of 2036 will be as radically different from 1976, as that year was from 1916. They point to the 21st-century “triple aim” goal to both improve patient care and population health, as well as reduce costs, and predict that board certification will have survived and ultimately thrived because of public demand and confidence in the continuing certification process. Board certification plays a vital role in professional self-regulation, and including involvement of the profession in setting standards, and boards assessing whether those standards are met, is crucial.

As the ABPD just recently celebrated its 75th anniversary and we look forward to celebrating our own 100th anniversary in the not too distant future, it is important to reflect on where we are and what direction we're headed. This Fall, your board is taking on the task of writing a new strategic plan for the upcoming few years and I am certain they will work hard to take advantage of all the opportunities for continued improvement of the certification process and find ways of helping to advance patient outcomes. As Hanemann, et al., point out, the public equates the term “board certified” with the highest level of expertise in a medical specialty. Of course, the real trick will be to do all this while actually showing a return on investment (improve patient care and population health while reducing costs) and decreasing the administrative burden to our practicing pediatric dentists. ABPD knows it is all too easy to just keep “piling on” without evidenced based information to guide decision making, and so far, we’ve done a good job of keeping the board certification process pretty user friendly.

It's been my pleasure to serve these past five years and I look forward to the next five years with continued enthusiasm and excitement for the future. My best to you all, Jeff

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