

APMA Summit on Board Certification

Background

The APMA Summit on Board Certification was held on Monday, March 20, in Washington, DC. The summit included 120 registered attendees, including members of the APMA Board of Trustees and APMA staff. Additionally, more than 75 participants listened to the seminar via Zoom. Participants represented many diverse backgrounds and included a wide range of professional experiences.

APMA's goal in holding this summit was to serve as an impartial facilitator for an open and productive discussion on a vitally important topic for the podiatric profession. Organizations that grant board certification do not fall under APMA's jurisdiction, and likewise the recognition and credentialing of these boards is the responsibility of the Council on Podiatric Medical Education (CPME) through its Specialty Board Recognition Committee (SBRC). APMA has no influence on decisions made by CPME.

When speaking about "the boards," it should be noted there are two boards recognized by the SBRC (formerly the Joint Committee on the Recognition of Specialty Boards): the American Board of Podiatric Medicine (ABPM) and the American Board of Foot and Ankle Surgery (ABFAS). However, podiatrists also obtain board certification through non-SBRC-recognized organizations, including the American Board of Multiple Specialties in Podiatry (ABMSP) and the American Board of Lower Extremity Surgery (ABLES). As the summit was a podiatry-wide discussion on board certification, all boards had the opportunity to attend to offer their perspectives.

A recording of the summit and other support materials shared during the event are available at www.apma.org/boardsummit.

Summary

APMA President Sylvia Virbulis, DPM, welcomed attendees to the Summit on Board Certification and introduced summit moderator Tim Tillo, DPM. Dr. Tillo reviewed the rules and code of conduct for the summit. He then introduced APMA Executive Director and CEO James R. Christina, DPM, to present additional information so all attendees could start the summit and their discussions with a common understanding and background.

Dr. Christina described the history of boards within podiatric medicine and surgery, as well as podiatric residencies. He also provided background on allopathic and osteopathic boards. Next, he described the current qualification and certification process for the two SBRC-recognized boards. He also provided an overview of the data APMA collected in its pre-summit survey, which was completed by more than 900 podiatrists.

With Dr. Christina's background information in mind, each table held a breakout discussion to respond to the question "Are podiatrists having trouble getting hospital privileges or on insurance panels related to board certification?" After completing their discussions, the 12 groups reported out. Several common themes emerged:

- There is massive inconsistency among hospitals, insurance panels, and hospital systems regarding criteria for credentialing, and often there are inconsistencies within a single system (e.g., the VA), too.
- A lack of a universal scope of practice, coupled with multiple board certifications has created rampant confusion among administrators.
- Some podiatrists are challenged by the timeline for collecting surgical cases for board certification, and this challenge is compounded when a contract calls for surgical board certification within five years rather than the seven years allowed by the board.
- Podiatrists working within orthopedic departments, or within surgery departments overseen by an orthopedist, face additional scrutiny and roadblocks to being granted appropriate privileges.

After a brief break, attendees participated in an open discussion to present their suggested solutions to board certification challenges. During this time, participants shared personal experiences, frustrations with the current situation, and possible solutions.

Following the open discussion, attendees continued the conversation within their breakout groups and were tasked with identifying a clearly defined solution to the current challenges. The groups then presented their suggestions, and again common themes emerged:

- There was a strong preference for a single certifying board with multiple subspecialty areas of recognition under its umbrella.
- A collection of all podiatry stakeholders, including the current boards (regardless of SBRC recognition), experienced podiatrists, young physicians, current students, etc., and professional experts representing insurance panels, hospitals, and credentialing should come together to start planning a path forward for the profession.
- Other issues to address through this group:
 - The process for podiatrists who are already board certified
 - Funding for the new certifying body
 - Limited certification window and its disparate impact
 - Pathway to “quick” certification/qualification through residency training

Following lunch, attendees were tasked with defining the next steps needed to accomplish the consensus goal of a single certifying board. After discussing within their breakout groups, they shared their ideas. While there was a similar focus among groups, there were several approaches considered:

- Identify a mediator to bring together and resolve the existing conflicts among the boards as a first step toward unification.
 - Should APMA vet and identify a mediator, or present a list of mediators? Should each board suggest a mediator? Should APMA have any role in this next step?
- Additional data should be collected from the diplomates of each board to understand all challenges and establish a framework for the goals of a single certifying board, and the SBRC should be involved in this process.
- Townhall-style meetings should continue to gather as much feedback from the profession as possible, with the next discussion possibly held at The National in July.
- An aggressive but realistic timeline should be agreed upon for the transition to a single certifying board.
 - Twelve months for a clear framework of the new certifying board?

- Three years from now, with the goal of having the new certifying board and exam process in place when the newest cohort of residents complete their programs?
- Five to 10 years to allow adequate time to account for currently board-certified podiatrists to obtain status with the new single certifying board?

The summit ended with another open mic session to allow any participant who wished to share their final thoughts. These comments were by and large related to the next steps discussion and included in the bullets above.

APMA remains committed to supporting the podiatric profession in achieving its collective goals and will facilitate further discussion on this subject however it can.