

October 10, 2018

Richard G. Battaglia, MD, FACP
Chief Medical Officer
American Board of Internal Medicine
510 Walnut Street
Suite 1700
Philadelphia, PA 19106

Dear Dr. Battaglia:

The American College of Rheumatology (ACR) recently engaged the rheumatology community in a discussion related to the future of rheumatology certification and commissioned a survey. The purpose of this initiative was to gauge rheumatologist's perceptions on certification and help determine if an application should be prepared and submitted to the ABMS to request that rheumatology certification be moved from the ABIM to the ABAI with the formation of a new combined board of Allergy, Immunology, and Rheumatology.

The ACR undertook a significant communication effort to ensure that rheumatologists were informed about the issues related to board certification through the ABIM and the ABAI. The communication included information regarding the changes the ABIM has/is implementing and the feasibility, process and implications of moving rheumatology certification and recertification to a combined board with the ABAI. Communications included an explanation of the ACR's role as an intermediary and outlined the foundational assumptions that affirm the role of continuing board certification as part of the professional self-regulatory system and the commitment of rheumatologists to professional self-regulation as both a privilege and a responsibility.

The validity and utility of the survey was dependent on the community of rheumatologists being well informed. We were encouraged by the engagement statistics throughout the process. All emails generated by the ACR received more than double industry averages for engagement and the ACR's website traffic surpassed any prior ACR communication efforts. In addition, the quality of questions we received indicated that thoughtful consideration from the rheumatology community had been given to the information shared. This experience underscores the importance that the rheumatology community places on the issue of board certification.

To further ensure the validity of the survey results the ACR engaged an independent research and consulting firm. The electronic survey launched on June 19 and closed on July 10, 2018. An invitation to participate in the survey was successfully delivered to over 7,400 individual email addresses. Both the response and completion rates were above industry standard and the margin of error and confidence level was representative of the audience.

As the ACR is considering publishing the findings we are not at liberty to share the data in its entirety, at this stage. However, we can share the following preliminary insights for your consideration.

- When asked to rate the ABIM's initial certification program for rheumatology most rheumatologists are satisfied or neutral. Approximately 20% are dissatisfied.

- When asked to rate the ABIM’s MOC program for rheumatology, most rheumatologists are dissatisfied. The reasons for their dissatisfaction include that the ABIM MOC program is costly, burdensome, and not a true reflection of their abilities as clinicians or practice setting. This feedback is consistent with previous feedback collected by the ACR and the [physician findings](#) reported by the ABMS Continuing Board Certification: Vision for the Future Commission in the July 2018.
- Most rheumatologists plan to maintain certification for rheumatology but not internal medicine.
- Most rheumatologists are aware of the ABIM’s plan to offer a knowledge check-in for rheumatology in 2019; however, 30% don’t know if they will pursue the 2-year pathway or the 10-year exam.
- More rheumatologists prefer moving the rheumatology initial certification and MOC to the ABAI than staying with the ABIM and 30% need more information. Those in favor of moving expect an ABAI rheumatology MOC program to be better than an ABIM program in the time required to prepare for assessment(s), the ability to identify educational gaps, impact on clinical knowledge and ability to demonstrate they are staying current in the field of rheumatology.

Next steps

The ACR has long advocated for a certification model based on the principles of physician self-regulation that assesses knowledge while providing ability to improve knowledge in a manner that not only meets but enhances patient care. The results from this recent survey reaffirm this position and indicate that although most rheumatologists understand the changes the ABIM is implementing the rheumatology community wants a different and better MOC process. As a result we are further motivated to continue exploring all avenues for improving the process for rheumatologists and the patients they serve.

During the 2018 ACR/ARHP Annual Meeting, we intend to share preliminary survey findings (similar to what we have shared above) and gather additional feedback from the rheumatology community. We will also provide information to rheumatologists about the 2019 ABIM rheumatology knowledge check-in assessment option and suggest the “no consequence” year is an opportunity to evaluate the option. We will also encourage rheumatologists to visit the ABIM booth in the exhibit hall for specific questions related to their certification status.

Following the annual meeting we intend to continue to work with ABAI to develop and communicate a detailed proposal to help address some of the outstanding questions the rheumatology community has related to the formation of a new combined board of Allergy, Immunology, and Rheumatology.

The ACR Board of Directors will reconvene on this topic during its February 2019 meeting. This timeline will also provide us with an opportunity to analyze the ABMS Continuing Board Certification: Vision for the Future Commission draft report which we understand will be available for public comment in November 2018.

We appreciate the ABIM’s continuing efforts to share planned changes and engage with the ACR. We continue to hope that opportunities to develop new models or alternative pathways for MOC will become available and we remain open to such discussions.

We realize this timeline is not ideal for the ABIM or the ACR. However, the ACR remains committed throughout this period to ensuring rheumatologists have the information and educational resources needed to successfully maintain the ABIM certification. We look forward to working with you and the ABIM Rheumatology Board members towards this common goal as we have in the past.

Again, we appreciate the ongoing dialogue with ABIM as we work to enhance the process of specialty certification on behalf of rheumatologists and the patients they serve.

Sincerely,



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President, American College of Rheumatology

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Cc:

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