

MOC Deadline Looms Anew, as Resistance Mushrooms

Shelley Wood | April 25, 2014

PHILADELPHIA, PA — With just a few more days to register for their "maintenance of certification" (MOC), almost 8500 physicians have signed on to a [cardiologist-led petition](#) demanding that the **American Board of Internal Medicine** (ABIM) recall the changes it made this year to the MOC process.

After April 30, as previously [reported](#) by [heartwire](#), the ABIM will begin publicly reporting that physicians who are not registered are "not meeting MOC requirements."

The petition, created by **Dr Paul Teirstein** (Scripps Clinic, La Jolla, CA) on March 10, gathered 200 signatures in the first day, and support has mushroomed.

"The changes in the MOC requirements have upset a large number of cardiologists," Teirstein told [heartwire](#). "It seems that pretty much everyone I speak with is against these changes, and the main arguments against the changes I received are that they don't create value for physician—ie, they do not have significant educational value—and they take considerable time and increased expense."

The idea for a petition grew out of the email-based discussion group led by **Dr Morton Kern** (University of Irvine, CA). Kern has been sharing questions to his now-120 members by email, mostly interventionalists and cath-lab directors, for three years. Several of the most active threads have become the meat of his popular "Conversations in Cardiology" series, published in *Cath Lab Digest* and *Catheterization and Cardiovascular Interventions*. The response to a question from Teirstein, posed to Kern's group, spurred Teirstein to launch the petition.

The petition includes a section for comments that captures the increasingly vitriolic physician reaction to what many see as unfounded distrust of their ability to practice medicine and keep up to date, plus more time and money spent on unneeded credentialing requirements.

"The ABIM claim that the public and patients are demanding this is hogwash, a complete lie and deception," says one signatory from Florida. "Doctors, you all know better."

"Board certification has never been shown to increase the quality of care . . . it just increases the financial bottom line of the board," writes another from Texas. "Many of the MOC requirements are just silly."

"Extortionate fees, dubious benefit to anyone—the ABIM has lost credibility with me," writes yet another from Virginia. "We already have precious little time to meet other demands, like, say, patient care. Not to mention the MOC activities are terrible in their own right from what I can tell so far. . . . The requirements are vacuous exercises in time-wasting."

Open Letter Sent to ABIM

Teirstein sent an open letter earlier this week to the ABIM, presenting his petition and noting its "viral" popularity.

"Most physicians believe in lifelong learning and value continuing education. However, the MOC program falls very short of its goal of continuous physician education," the letter reads. It then zeroes in on the two key problems Teirstein outlined for [heartwire](#), saying these reflect the bulk of complaints collected online.

Many, including [theheart.org on Medscape](#) blogger **Dr John Mandrola**, resent the "arm-twisting tactics" that imply that doctors won't keep abreast of new information unless forced, or, as Mandrola [points out](#), the unproven assumption that the MOC brand of medical education actually leads to improved patient outcomes.

Then there are the costs and the revenue that the new MOC requirements is generating for the ABIM, something many critics see as the final straw. The latest publicly available IRS 990 statements for the ABIM, provided to **heartwire**, show that the annual budget for the organization was over \$50 million, with the CEO making \$800 000 in 2010.

Prominent blogger and electrophysiologist **Dr Westby Fisher**, an outspoken opponent of the new requirements, has **pointed out** that "since the advent of MOC recertification, the financial reserves of the ABIM and ABIM Foundation have increased substantially; in 2006 and 2007, the ABIM transferred \$13 million to its 'foundation.' "

After the announcement of the new requirements one year ago, the **Association of American Physicians and Surgeons** (AAPS) launched a lawsuit against the **American Board of Medical Specialties** (ABMS) "for restraining trade and causing a reduction in access by patients to their physicians." The AAPS also alleges that the MOC program will bring in "tens of millions of dollars in revenue" to the ABMS and 24 allied corporations, "which then pay prodigious salaries to their executives."

"A Silly Waste of Time"

It's been several years since the ABIM introduced mandatory recertification every 10 years. Then, in 2014, new MOC requirements were **introduced** with shorter deadlines, the idea being to ensure physician education remains continuous. Physicians must register before April 30, then demonstrate that they've accrued 10 "points" of accredited education modules within two years and a total of 100 points every five years.

Even cardiologists who were "grandfathered" within the ABIM requirements for having been board-certified prior to 1990 will now need to participate in MOC or otherwise face being listed as "certified, not meeting MOC requirements." After registering, physicians have until December 1, 2015 to complete at least one MOC activity to avoid being labeled as not meeting the requirements.

In addition to participating in MOC activities, physicians also need to complete a "patient safety and patient survey" module every five years that involves a review of their own patient data and "supports the implementation of and/or reporting on a quality-improvement plan for their practice."

This component in particular, Teirstein said, "was a silly waste of time. The people designing these things are clearly not busy practicing physicians."

Cardiology Organizations React

Cardiology specialty organizations are also wading into the fray. The **Society for Cardiovascular Angiography and Interventions** (SCAI) recently sent a letter to members announcing that it has formed an internal, physician-led MOC working group "whose initial task is to work with ABIM to address our MOC needs, both from an advocacy and a practical, day-to-day perspective."

The group aims to help members with the tools needed to "fulfill the MOC requirements in ways that are meaningful and quality-driven but not burdensome" and "engage with the ABIM to help them shape more relevant MOC process improvement."

Back in March, on the day of the earlier MOC registration deadline, **ACC** president-elect **Dr Kim Williams** (Wayne State University School of Medicine, Detroit, MI) also acknowledged the controversy over the MOC in an interview with **heartwire**.

"The ACC is committed to serving its members," Williams said at the time. "In this regard, we are not the drivers of MOC, but we believe in lifelong learning, however that's done, and to that extent that MOC is a process that is being required we will help our members obtain the MOC credits."

The ABIM has not yet responded to Teirstein's letter or to **heartwire**'s requests for comment.

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