

Correspondence

MOC: DATA, NO HYPE

To the Editor: As Chairman of the Board of Directors of the American Board of Allergy and Immunology (ABAI), I appreciate the opportunity to respond to Dr. Stanley Block's letter published in the July issue of the *Annals of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology* (volume 107, page 91).¹ Dr. Block's letter is in response to a "Perspective" written by Drs. John James and Mark Corbett supporting Maintenance of Certification (MOC).² In his letter, Dr. Block states that he has found it helpful to "follow the money" to assess whether there are conflicts of interest in the ABAI MOC program. He suggests that *Annals* readers need answers to 4 questions so that they can more accurately assess MOC and whether any undeclared motives are behind it. Dr. Block's questions are in bold font, and my answers follow each question.

1. How much money (if any) does the Board make from the MOC program? Although the ABAI MOC program has been in place for less than a year, the Board fully anticipates that the implementation of MOC will be a cost-neutral endeavor. The MOC fees paid by diplomates are essential for the development and maintenance of MOC programs by the ABAI. In addition, these fees are also used for the acquisition of MOC tools that have been developed by other Boards and professional societies that we feel will greatly benefit our diplomates. The time demands on ABAI staff to implement our MOC program in compliance with American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) standards required that the Board hire a new staff member who has the expertise to serve as the MOC coordinator. This person has a great deal of experience with MOC programs, having previously been an MOC coordinator at the American Board of Internal Medicine (ABIM). She is readily accessible to all diplomates who call or e-mail the ABAI office with questions pertaining to MOC. It is the hope and intent of the Board to reduce the cost of MOC once MOC achieves steady state and exactly what resources MOC requires to optimally serve our diplomates is clear. The Directors are cognizant of the costs to our diplomates and are working diligently to keep these costs to as low as possible, while still maintaining a high level of service and quality.

2. What is the annual salary of the President of the Board? The annual salary paid to the President of the ABAI is \$94,000. The salary for this position is computed as being one-third of a full-time position and is based on Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) data for Professors of Medicine and Pediatrics. Duties of the position include traveling to at least 15 meetings per year to represent the Board. These meetings range from 2 to 5 days and average 3 days per meeting, requiring that the President be away from home approximately 48 to 50 days over the past year. Last year, the President attended the following meetings on official ABAI business: 2 Allergy/Immunology Residency Review Committee (RRC) meetings, the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology (AAAAI) and American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology (ACAAI)

annual meetings, 4 quarterly ABMS meetings, 3 ABMS special meetings, 1 Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME)/ABMS meeting, a special visit to the ACAAI Board of Regents summer meeting, the AAAAI Board of Directors retreat, and 2 ABAI Board of Directors meetings. The President also attends meetings with the parent Boards (ABIM and American Board of Pediatrics) as necessary. Additionally, the President travels to the ABAI office to meet with staff. These meetings amount to approximately 1,428 hours of work per year. He also spends, on average, 10 hours per week answering correspondence and participating in conference calls and performing other duties of the position. When all of this is taken into consideration, the President of the ABAI works an average of 35 hours per week.

3. Are members of the Board paid, and if so, how much? Directors attend two 3-day meetings of the board annually and are compensated \$1,000 for each ABAI meeting they attend. These are 11 to 12 hours per day working meetings held at standard convenient, affordable locations such as airport hotels in major US cities or in Philadelphia near the ABAI offices. Given that the first day of a meeting starts at 7:00 AM, part of an additional day of travel also should be considered into the time commitment for each Board member. Therefore, Board members are compensated at a rate of \$250 per day that they are away from home. An additional annual stipend of \$1,000 is provided to support the extra activities of the Board Co-Chairs, examination Co-chairs, and the chair of the MOC committee. Directors' overall responsibilities are to set policy for the ABAI. Additional responsibilities for all Board directors include writing 30 to 40 new questions for board examinations each year, reviewing and modifying at least 200 questions before and again at the meetings, and putting together psychometrically sound examinations. After examination administration, Directors review the examination to assure validity of all questions. These efforts require many hours of uncompensated effort. Directors who serve on the Executive Committee, the MOC committee, and the Audit and Finance committees also participate in regular conference calls at a frequency of 12, 4, and 4 per year, respectively, for which they receive no compensation. In addition, selected Directors serve as liaisons to the American Board of Internal Medicine (ABIM) and American Board of Pediatrics (ABP), serving those boards and attending their meetings as appropriate (1–3 per year) with compensation from the ABIM or ABP as appropriate. One of our Directors also serves as a member of the ABMS Board of Directors and attends 4 meetings per year without compensation. Directors also serve on many internal ABAI committees, including audit and finance, ethics, conjoint credentials, and Maintenance of Certification. The latter committee is charged with developing new MOC materials, and the members attend a number of meetings of ABMS and other organizations involved in MOC efforts. All of these Director activities are uncompensated.

4. How much money do our professional societies make from their "prep courses" for recertification, and are Board members ever paid as faculty members for such courses? I cannot answer this question because I have never served on an AAAAI/ACAAI preparation course for the ABAI certification or recertification examination. ABAI Directors are not permitted to participate as faculty

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for these courses because of the potential for conflict of interest and to alleviate any perception of special insight into the examination as a result of attending a particular course, and Directors may not participate in such courses for at least 2 years after their 6-year term as Director has ended. The question as to the amount of money the professional societies make from these courses therefore should be directed to our societies, because the ABAI does not share in any proceeds whatsoever.

I thank Dr. Block for raising these questions and appreciate the opportunity to answer them directly and honestly. The ABAI seeks to operate in a transparent fashion to serve our diplomates as optimally as possible. The ABAI staff in Philadelphia is “customer friendly” and welcomes the opportunity to answer any question that diplomates have regarding MOC or any other facet of our Board functions. Additionally, I direct interested readers to the President’s column in the ABAI newsletter that will be appearing in the next

month, in which a more detailed financial analysis of the Board will be presented.

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1. Block SB. MOC: We need more data and less hype. *Ann Allergy Asthma Immunol.* 2011;107:91.
2. James J, Corbett M. Perspective: The American Board of Allergy and Immunology maintenance of certification program: “To do or not to do? That is the question”. *Ann Allergy Asthma Immunol.* 2010;106:485–488.