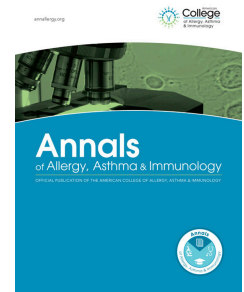


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Life-long learning and the ABAI: practice improvement comes of age

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Disclosures:

MHG, MC, and ANW are current Directors of the American Board of Allergy and Immunology (ABAI), JO is a former Director and Chair of the ABAI and is the current ABAI liaison to ABIM.

MHG has participated on advisory boards for AstraZeneca, Genentech, and Novartis, and is an Associate Editor for the Annals of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology.

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ANW receives grants from DBV Technologies, Astellas Pharma, Nutricia, and Nestle; receives royalties from UpToDate; serves on advisory boards for the Gerber Institute, Merck, ALK-Abello, Regeneron; and is the deputy editor for the Annals of Allergy Asthma and Immunology.

Commitment to life-long learning is one of the hallmarks of a medical career. For diplomates of the American Board of Allergy and Immunology (ABAI) involvement in practice improvement activities is required for continued participation in Maintenance of Certification (MOC, see figure). These activities, which are classified as Part IV MOC, are intended “to help the physician investigate and evaluate their patient care practices, appraise and assimilate scientific evidence and improve their practice of medicine”.¹ In the past these practice assessment activities have focused on improvement in clinical practice – with specific modules focused on asthma, atopic dermatitis, immunizations, and pediatric medical home, or clinical care quality improvement projects. This year the ABAI has added a module that gives credit for participation in the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology Quality Clinical Data Registry (QCDR). Individual or a group of providers will get credit based on the 2018 MIPS reporting requirements for participation in the QCDR.

These options all provide the ability to obtain credit for clinical care improvement activities; however, not all diplomates are engaged in clinical care focused careers. For example, a clinician-educator at a medical school may see patients, but his or her primary function may be to provide education to the next generation of allergist-immunologists. This individual could participate in clinical care improvement activities, but for his/her career an improved ability to provide education would have a larger impact. Similar concerns could be raised for diplomates who are engaged in research and administration. It seems in all of these cases that the improvement activities should be aligned with the individual’s career trajectory. Importantly, all of these activities contribute directly or indirectly to improvement in the care of patients with allergic and immunologic disease.

To address this issue, the ABAI has developed “Alternatives to Practice Assessment/Quality Improvement Modules” (see figure). The goal is to provide diplomates with opportunities to showcase the continual improvement activities they are involved in that apply to their specific career path. A full listing of these options can be found on the ABAI website.¹

For those who provide supervision of learners, there is a Mentorship/Supervision module. Supervision of at least one mentee with at least 4 supervision events is required. Diplomates who wish to claim this MOC credit will have to provide information on the mentee(s), time frame of interactions, the goals of the mentee(s), as well as skills acquired, knowledge gained, and barriers encountered. This information has to be submitted through the online portal.

The Service to the Profession module will provide credit for those who serve in leadership positions in national societies (such as being on the program committee or a grant reviewer for such a society), as well as leaders in local, regional, and state allergy societies. Residency review committee members can also request credit under this module.

While in the past, Part IV MOC activities provided credit for quality improvement activities (and still does), these activities were focused on the diplomates clinical practice. With these new modules, there is now an option to obtain credit for serving on a hospital, clinic, or department quality improvement or root cause analysis committee, as well as working on a specific quality

improvement project for the hospital, department, or practice. Furthermore, credit can be obtained via serving on committees related to patient care and safety (such as pharmacy and therapeutics committees) or for leadership of case conferences that are designed to improve patient care.

A new module for the Development and Transmission of Knowledge will be of interest to those in academia. Credit can be obtained for numerous scholarly activities, such as obtaining a 3 year or greater grant, publishing scholarly works, reviewing manuscripts, or serving as an editor or on an editorial board of an allergy and immunology related journal. This module will also provide credit for “key faculty” or members of a training program evaluation committee in ACGME accredited allergy and immunology training programs.

Finally, there is a module dedicated to self-improvement. This module focuses on the individual, and includes credit for academic advancement (such as promotion from assistant to associate professor), participation in a program to prevent professional burn-out, or successfully completing a leadership program from a national professional organization or academic institution.

As outlined above, these alternative modules provide diplomates multiple opportunities to obtain credit for the career development and improvement activities in which they are already engaged. These new modules also provide credit for the important work our diplomates engage in to advance the specialty of allergy and immunology. Of course, it is important to note that the clinical care improvement modules are still available and these new modules do not detract from participation in them.

For those diplomates who are interested in applying for Part IV MOC through the new alternative modules there are some important points to remember. Most modules will require a request form, as well as an attestation by a responsible party (such as department chair, journal editor, etc.). All activities for which the diplomate is claiming credit must have occurred within the current 5-year MOC cycle. The modules are accessed through the ABAI portal and all information must be submitted within 30 days of starting the module. Further, to allow for appropriate follow-up by the ABAI staff, all submissions for the current year must be submitted by October 1. This means that if you are in year 5 of your MOC cycle, you must submit your information by October 1 to avoid a lapse in your MOC participation.

ABAI Diplomates are involved in many disparate areas within the field of allergy and immunology. While practice improvement activities in the past have focused on clinical care, the ABAI has now acknowledged that many diplomates have other focuses to their careers. The alternative pathway embraces the concept of life-long learning, and allows the diplomate to obtain credit for those activities which are most beneficial to their specific career in allergy and immunology. Thus, the ABAI now is providing credit for the skills and activities that improve the individual practice of medicine for every diplomate in allergy and immunology.

Acknowledgements

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Figure legend

The Maintenance of Certification (MOC) pathway for the American Board of Allergy and Immunology (ABAI). All diplomates are expected to participate in all four components (Parts I-IV) of the MOC pathway to remain a diplomate of the ABAI. Recent changes to Part IV have now allowed for credit through the use of alternative modules. See text and the ABAI website for more details. For information on the Continuous Assessment Program (CAP) Pilot (Part III MOC), please see the recent publication by Bernstein, *et al.*²

ABAI Maintenance of Certification (MOC)

Part I

Professional standing

Maintain current, valid, unrestricted license(s) to practice medicine in the United States, territories, or Canada

Part II

Life-long learning and self-assessment

1. CME credits 25 *AMA PRA Category 1 Credit(s)TM* per year
2. Patient safety module every 10 years

Part III

Cognitive expertise

Continuous Assessment Program (CAP) Pilot

Two five-year cycles. Each year consists of two six-month question blocks, 30 article-based and 10 core / general knowledge questions.

Part IV

Practice Assessment / Quality Improvement

One of the following activities completed every 5 years:

1. Quality improvement activities approved by the ABAI
2. AAAAI Quality Clinical Data Registry
3. One of the following alternative modules:
 - a) Mentorship/Supervision
 - b) Service to the Profession
 - c) Service to improve Safety and Patient Care
 - d) Development and Transmission of Knowledge
 - e) Service for Self-Improvement