

The American Board of Anesthesiology Recertification Process

Beware and Be Aware!

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In May of 1989, the American Board of Anesthesiology (ABA) announced its intent to develop a program for Continued Demonstration of Qualifications (CDQ). This concept arose because of the ABA's desire to enable its diplomates to demonstrate to the public that they maintain the attributes of a board-certified anesthesiologist.

Initially, this was a voluntary program. However, in 1995 the ABA approved a policy of time-limited certificates, whereby candidates taking the exam after 2000 would have a 10-year expiration date on their certificates. It also provided that a diplomate who passed the exam prior to 2000 could take the recertification exam voluntarily, with no risk of losing diplomate status, even if the recertification exam is not passed.

This new program is intended to replace the current recertification exam, which will end in 2009.

Now, why is there any confusion? All of this sounds very straightforward. However, in 2002, the ABA introduced a new program for maintenance of certification of anesthesiology (MOCA). This new program is intended to replace the current recertification exam, which will end in 2009.

Although that description sounds relatively uncomplicated, there has been a great deal of confusion and misunderstanding about the program and facets of the overall process, especially among those of us in the pre-2000 category. I will try to present some information to clear up the confusion.

Let us first define our terms.

MOCA: Maintenance of Certification in Anesthesiology. The new 10-year process effective January 1, 2000, that is designed to effect the recertification of anesthesiologists through lifelong learning and self-assessment, periodic assessments of performance, and successful completion of an examination. For those first certified during or after 2000, an examination for recertification is mandatory; for those certified before 2000, it is voluntary.

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TLC: Time-Limited Certificates. Certificates issued by the ABA under the post-2000, 10-year recertification program.

ACE: Anesthesia Continuing Education. A new program, scheduled for release in October 2004, from the **American Society of Anesthesiologists (ASA)**. The program prepares diplomates for the MOCA examinations by providing expert guidance and self-evaluation tools. Participation in the program earns **Continuing Medical Education (CME)** credits.

SEE: Self-Education and Evaluation. The already existing ASA program that provides information on the latest developments in anesthesia.

LL-SA: Lifelong Learning and Self-Assessment. MOCA's requirement for maintenance of certification through self-directed professional development: 350 credits for CME activities—at least 250 of which must be Category 1 credits for ACCME-approved programs or activities, and at most 100 credits for which Category 1 credit is not awarded. This requirement will overlap for those whose individual state medical boards require CME credits in order to renew their medical licenses. California requires 100 CME credits every four years for relicensure.

The basic intent of the entire MOCA program is to ensure that individual anesthesiologists assume the responsibility for their own progress and performances and meet all the requirements for recertification of diplomate status. To enable this process, the ASA's ACE program allows them to participate in ongoing self-tutoring, setting their own pace of study. The actual process consists of a series of tests—each issue containing 100 questions and answers compiled by a group of experts in their fields—which are returned for scoring. Also provided are discussions of each question and references for further study. Up to 30 hours of category 1 CME credits are available for each 100-question test. The first issue, in booklet form only, was scheduled for release in October 2004. Subsequent issues, in April and October 2005, may be in electronic form.

Each 10-year MOCA cycle begins the year after certification or the year the diplomate registers for MOCA, whichever happens last. If you don't register for MOCA before the end of the first calendar year following your certification, your certificate will expire before you can complete MOCA. Those who received their time-limited certificates in 2000, 2001, 2002, and 2003 must complete their first MOCA cycles within 6, 7, 8, and 9 years, respectively, before their certification expires. Therefore, if they did not register for MOCA in 2004, they will not be able to complete the MOCA cycles before certification expires.

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There is one consolation for those within the above category—the LL-SA requirement of 350 credits is prorated, ranging from 210 credits for the 2000 certification year to 315 credits for 2003.

The ASA and CSA are currently working with the ABA in developing a system whereby CME credits from courses taken can be sent directly to the ABA. These credits would count toward fulfilling the MOCA CME credit requirements.

A few details about taking the recertification exams:

Those who received their time-limited certificates in 2000, 2001, 2002, and 2003 must complete their first MOCA cycles within 6, 7, 8, and 9 years, respectively, before their certification expires. Therefore, if they did not register for MOCA in 2004, they will not be able to complete the MOCA cycles before certification expires.

Once a diplomate has been certified, the next exam for recertification can be taken no earlier than in year seven of the 10-year cycle. You may apply electronically, using the ABA Electronic Application System at www.abanes.org, or print out a paper application form from that site. The application fee is \$500 for anesthesiology recertification and \$1,000 for a subspecialty program.

The *standard deadline* for the ABA to receive an *anesthesiology* application and fee is December 15 of the year before the examination year. The *late deadline* (which requires a nonrefundable \$200 late fee) is January 15 of the examination year. The *standard deadline* for receipt of a subspecialty application and fee is February 15 of the examination year, and the *late deadline* is March 15. The ABA warns that a recertification application received after the late deadline for the examination will not be accepted, regardless of the reason.

You have one opportunity per calendar year (exams are given only once each year), for a maximum of three years, to satisfy the examination requirements. If at the end of those three attempts you have not passed the examination, your application will be declared void. You may then reapply to the ABA, which includes all of the same fees and paperwork encountered in the first application.

One area of confusion that has been of concern to those certified as diplomates before the start of the 2000 program was the question of whether the term “voluntary” recertification truly meant that there was no requirement for those holding lifetime certificates to go through the recertification process—and no penalty for not doing so. In the words of the ABA’s “Booklet of Information” dated March 2004, “*ABA diplomates certified before 2000 may voluntarily participate in either the recertification program... or the MOCA program. The first time they register*

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for MOCA they may complete an ‘expedited MOCA program’ in as soon as one year.” An expedited MOCA program can be completed only once; after that, the 10-year MOCA program is the only option. The ongoing program of voluntary recertification (available since 1993 *only* to pre-2000 diplomates) will close in 2009, so anyone foreseeing a possible need for recertification may want to participate while it’s available. After 2009, voluntary MOCA will be the only option for pre-2000 diplomates. According to the ABA, participation in either voluntary recertification or voluntary MOCA will not jeopardize a participant’s pre-2000 diplomate status.

Head still spinning? The best advice possible to give you for detailed information about the recertification process is to access the ABA website at **www.theABA.org**. There is an abundance of information at that site that can’t be included here, and you will benefit from knowing all the official details that apply to each process.

Plan now to attend!

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