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4300 MONTGOMERY AVE., SUITE 206 • BETHESDA, MD 20814

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Special Message

Addiction Medicine Recognized by ABMS

March 14, 2016

Dear Colleagues,

We are pleased to inform you that the American Board of Medical Specialties announced today the recognition of addiction medicine as a multispecialty subspecialty. The American Board of Preventive Medicine (ABPM) sponsored the successful application for our field.

ABMS recognition of addiction medicine as a specialized field of expertise and practice has long been a goal of many members of the physician community. Over several decades the recognition of addiction medicine has been promoted by the American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM) and for the last nine years, by The American Board of Addiction Medicine (ABAM). Until now, the only ABMS recognized pathway for physician training and certification in addiction has been through the subspecialty of addiction psychiatry, which is only available to psychiatrists. Psychiatrists and representatives of many other specialties have recognized the need to expand the expert workforce to address the medical and public health problems of unhealthy substance use and addiction, and have been supportive of this new pathway open to physicians from across medicine.

ABMS recognition brings with it many benefits:

- Assurance of the highest standards of physician practice in the prevention, treatment and management of addiction;
- Enhanced visibility as a subspecialty career option for medical students and residents;
- Growing access to addiction prevention and treatment services across health care;
- A strong message to the public that American medicine considers addiction a preventable and treatable disease, for which expert care can and should be provided;
- A recognition that those who provide this expert care meet the "gold standard" in board certification and are within the mainstream of the medical community;

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- The ability of addiction medicine fellowship training programs to seek the highest level of accreditation as is provided by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME);
- Increased access to federal and other funds for fellowship training, and;
- Parity on the levels of: patient access to prevention and treatment; training and credentialing of expert physicians; organizational privileging of physician experts; insurance coverage for patients needing services; and reimbursement to physicians who provide addiction medicine services.


This landmark event recognizes addiction as a preventable and treatable disease, helping to shed the stigma of misunderstanding that has long plagued it. It acknowledges risky substance use as a public health problem and addiction as a disease, often chronic in nature and co-occurring with other health problems. It sends a loud and clear signal that patients can and should seek care from trained and certified physicians and be assured that the care they receive is grounded in research, science and evidence-based practice.

The leadership by ABPM in bringing addiction medicine into official standing within the family of medicine has been the key to this success, and will remain essential as our field moves forward. ABPM is a natural home for addiction medicine as we know that a critical aspect of our work is prevention of this disease and of the other costly health and social consequences of substance use. The ABAM Directors look forward to working with ABPM to plan a smooth transition for addiction medicine certification and maintenance of certification (MOC) activities. Decisions related to a Practice Pathway and future certification exams will be announced by ABPM, and we will update you when that news is available. Updates will be provided on the ABAM website (www.abam.net), and on occasion by individual email or postal mail (please keep your addresses current). An FAQ feature is now available on the website with additional information.

We know that there is work that must be continued to fulfill the promise of a physician workforce of clinicians, faculty and change agents who can bring prevention and treatment into the 21st century. Your continued commitment and leadership will make this possible.

As we all celebrate this occasion, we hope that you will take a moment and reflect with pride on your own contributions to our newly recognized field. As ABAM diplomates you have been at the forefront in the care of patients with substance use disorders. Your work has been driven by the will to care for patients and families, and to improve their lives and the health of your community. You have stood up to stigma, ignorance and to outdated policies and practices that accompanied this most challenging of all diseases. You have had many successes with patients and colleagues along the way and have set the stage for medicine's response to addiction. You have pioneered this new era in American medicine and healthcare. Thank you, and savor the moment.

Sincerely,



Patrick G. O'Connor, M.D., M.P.H
Immediate Past President



Robert J. Sokol, M.D.
President