Keep Specialty Standards in the Hands of the Experts

BY LARRY A. GREEN, MD



I started practicing as a family doctor more than 50 years ago, and medicine has changed a lot since then. But one thing has remained constant: American Board of Family Medicine (ABFM) continuing certification has helped me be a better doctor and teacher. ABFM, part of the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS), conducts research on meaningful changes in medicine and curates evidence from peer-reviewed literature I use in my practice and teaching.

Recently I was in Washington, D.C., to make a case to Congress that I believe serves the public: the best people to set high standards for America's physicians are expert physicians in each specialty.

The reasons are practical: Physicians understand the science and practice behind medical standards. That means we can set standards that really matter, instead of ones that don't. Through continuing certification, we can curate and share the most meaningful improvements to specialty practice with physicians across the country to ensure standards of practice reflect the latest science and result in the best outcomes for patients. Responsibility should not fall to insurance companies, governments, or their agencies. It's in the public interest for physicians to set and maintain high standards for ourselves.

A 2021 BMJ Open study found patients of high-scoring physicians had about 30 percent lower risk of death, emergency visits, and hospitalization. In a 2025 national survey, 93 percent of adults valued board certification when choosing a doctor. Most recently, a 2026 systematic review published in Academic Medicine found "examination performance was linked to improved adherence to mammography screening recommendations, appropriate prescribing practices, improved care of patients with diabetes, lower patient morbidity and mortality, fewer complaints to regulatory bodies, and lower malpractice payments."[1]

That's what's at stake if we relinquish or lower the standards for physician board certification. We know that continuing medical education (CME) is not sufficient to keep physicians current in the national standards of care for each specialty. Recurring verification of skills and knowledge through ongoing assessments is critical to ensuring the highest quality medical workforce while also demonstrating to the public that physicians are willing to hold themselves to the highest standards. This is not an elective for a profession. It is an obligation and duty of medicine as a profession.

This issue is about policy, not politics. And whatever our disagreements about healthcare policy and reforms, we can agree that patients deserve physicians to set and meet high standards, and that the standards are best set by those who understand what it takes to meet them.

Fifty years of continuing board certification made me a better doctor and a better teacher. For future physicians and those they will care for, I believe it is critical to maintain these standards as strong as possible, set by physicians.

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[1] *Academic Medicine,* Volume 101, Issue 8, August 2026, Pages 1012–1026, https://doi.org/10.1093/acamed/wvag065