

Understanding the Difference Between Accreditation, Licensure and Certification

Accreditation of Training Programs

The mission of the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) is to improve the quality of health care in the United States by ensuring and improving the quality of graduate medical education experience for physicians in training.

The ACGME

- ! establishes national standards for graduate medical education by which it approves and continually assesses educational programs under its aegis.
- ! uses the most effective methods available to evaluate the quality of graduate medical education programs.
- ! strives to develop evaluation methods and processes that are valid, effective, fair, open and ethical.

Under the aegis of the ACGME, the accreditation of graduate medical education programs is carried out by review committees with delegated accreditation authority.

Requirements for accreditation:

- ! Graduate medical education programs are accredited when they are judged to be in substantial compliance with the Essentials of Accredited Residencies in Graduate Medical Education.
- ! The Essentials consist of (a) an introductory Preface, (b) the Institutional Requirements which are prepared by the ACGME, approved by its sponsoring organizations, and apply to all programs, and (c) the Program Requirements which are prepared by a review committee for its area(s) of competence and approved by the ACGME.

Maintenance of accreditation:

- ! Programs must continue to demonstrate substantial compliance with the Essentials of Accredited Residencies in Graduate Medical Education.
- ! Review committees hold regularly scheduled meetings to review programs to determine whether the programs are in substantial compliance with the Essentials of Accredited Residencies in Graduate Medical Education.

Each review committee is responsible for preparation of the program requirements for the area(s) of its competency, and for periodic revisions to reflect current educational and clinical best practice.

Evaluation of Physicians - Medical Licensure and Certification

Physicians are formally evaluated by two principal mechanisms in the United States:

- ! State Licensure
- ! Specialty Board Certification

Medical Licensure

- ! State licensure is a regulatory requirement to practice medicine in the U.S.
- ! Minimum requirements for licensure:
 - ▶ Graduation from an accredited medical school
 - ▶ Passage of national/state licensure examination
 - ▶ At least one year of post-graduate training
- ! Maintenance of licensure:
 - ▶ Absence of disciplinary actions
 - ▶ Minimum amount of CME required by most states

Specialty Board Certification

Boards develop and utilize professional and educational standards for the evaluation and certification of physician specialists. The boards evaluate physician candidates who voluntarily seek certification. To accomplish this function, the boards determine whether candidates have received appropriate preparation in approved residency training programs in accordance with established educational standards, evaluate candidates with comprehensive examinations, and certify those candidates who have satisfied the board requirements. The boards also offer recertification at intervals of seven to ten years.

- ! Time limited certification is offered by 24 officially recognized specialty boards
- ! Specialty boards are private, autonomous certifying organizations that lack membership constituencies
- ! Certification is voluntary but 85% of U.S. doctors currently possess this credential
- ! Requirements for certification:
 - ▶ satisfactory completion of formal training
 - ▶ satisfactory performance on board examinations
 - ▶ practice experience required by some boards
- ! Maintenance of certification requires completion of Board recertification programs

DIRECT QUESTIONS REGARDING:	TO:
Accreditation status of a program	ACGME [www.acgme.org]
Whether a particular specialty is accredited	ACGME
Violations of due process	ACGME
A program's non-compliance with the Essentials	ACGME
Whether an individual is board-certified	Individual Specialty Board
Determination of how much credit an individual resident can receive for prior training in another specialty or country	Individual Specialty Board
Eligibility for the certifying examination	Individual Specialty Board
Evaluation of residents	Individual Specialty Board
Any disciplinary actions taken against a physician	State Licensure Board
Whether a physician is licensed in a particular state	State Licensure Board
Dates for the USMLE-Step 3	Federation of State Licensing Boards or Individual State Licensure Board

Please note that most of these organizations have active websites which have valuable information, and may contain answers to your questions.