The Booklet on Recertification and Maintenance of Certification (MOC) is published by the American Board of Surgery (ABS) to outline the examination requirements for recertification and Maintenance of Certification in all ABS specialties. Diplomates are advised to thoroughly review its contents.

This edition of the booklet supersedes all previous publications of the ABS concerning its policies, procedures, and requirements for examination and certification. The ABS reserves the right to make changes in its fees, policies, procedures, and requirements at any time; admission to the certification process is governed by the policies and requirements in effect during the current application period and is at the discretion of the ABS. Applicants should visit the ABS website at www.absurgery.org for the most recent updates.

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I. GENERAL INFORMATION

A. About Recertification and Maintenance of Certification
The American Board of Surgery considers recertification and Maintenance of Certification (MOC) to be voluntary in the same manner as initial certification. Diplomates may apply for recertification three years prior to the expiration of their current certificate and must meet the requirements in force at that time.

Diplomates who certify or recertify in any ABS specialty after July 1, 2005 must thereafter comply with the requirements of the ABS Maintenance of Certification Program, which replaces the ABS’ traditional recertification requirements.

Individuals who believe they meet ABS requirements may begin the recertification process by applying for admission to the respective examination. The application is reviewed by the ABS and, if approved, the applicant is granted a number of opportunities within a five-year period to take and pass the MOC examination in that specialty. Upon successful completion of the examination process, the candidate is deemed recertified by the ABS in the specialty and is automatically enrolled in the ABS MOC Program. Diplomates already in MOC must be in compliance to be eligible to apply for an MOC exam.

B. Recertification and MOC in Surgery and Surgical Specialties
Recertification and MOC in general surgery is not mandatory for recertification/MOC of specialty certification. Diplomates are, however, strongly encouraged to maintain certification in both general surgery and their specialty. Diplomates who become certified in general surgery and then wish to become certified in another ABS specialty must be in compliance with MOC to be admissible to the certification process. If a diplomate’s certificate in general surgery expires, he or she will no longer be considered certified in general surgery, even if he or she maintains the validity of a specialty certificate.

C. Ethics and Professionalism
The American Board of Surgery believes that certification by the ABS carries an obligation for ethical behavior and professionalism in all conduct. The exhibition of unethical behavior or a lack of professionalism by an applicant or diplomate may therefore prevent the certification of the applicant or may result in the suspension or revocation of certification. All such determinations shall be at the sole discretion of the ABS.

Unethical and unprofessional behavior is denoted by any dishonest behavior, including: cheating; lying; falsifying information; misrepresenting one's educational background, certification status and/or professional experience; and failure to report misconduct. The American Board of Surgery has adopted a “zero tolerance” policy toward these behaviors, and individuals exhibiting such behaviors may be permanently barred from certification, reported to state medical boards, and/or legally prosecuted for copyright or other violations if identified.

(See also H-2. Examination Irregularities; see www.absurgery.org for complete Ethics and Professionalism Policy)

D. Time-Limited Certificates
It is the current policy of the ABS that all certificates are valid only for a period of ten years, from the date of issuance through Dec. 31 of the year of expiration. The ABS reserves the right to change the duration of its certificates or the requirements for maintenance of certification at any time.

Surgeons who recertify prior to the expiration date of their certificate receive a new certificate with an expiration date extending from the expiration date of the previous certificate, not the date of recertification.

E. Reporting of Status
The ABS considers the personal information and examination record of an applicant or diplomate to be private and confidential. When an inquiry is received regarding an individual’s status with the ABS, a general statement is provided indicating the person’s current situation as pertains to ABS certification, along with his or her certification history.
In response to an inquiry, the ABS will report an individual’s status as either Certified or Not Certified. In certain cases, one of the following descriptions may also be reported: In the Examination Process, Clinically Inactive, Suspended, or Revoked. Please refer to the Reporting of Status Policy at www.absurgery.org for definitions of the above terms.

Individuals may describe themselves as certified by the ABS or as an ABS diplomate only when they hold a current ABS certificate. Those whose certificates have expired will be considered “Not Certified.” An individual’s status may be verified through the ABS website, www.absurgery.org.

The ABS supplies biographical and demographic data on diplomates to the ABMS for its Directory of Certified Medical Specialists, which is available at www.abms.org. Upon certification, diplomates will be contacted by the ABMS and asked to specify which information they would like to appear in the directory. Diplomates will have their listings retained in the directory only if they maintain their certification according to the ABS MOC Program.

F. Reconsideration and Appeals
The ABS may deny or grant an applicant or candidate the privilege of examination whenever the facts in the case are deemed by the ABS to so warrant. Applicants and candidates may request the reconsideration and appeal as outlined in the ABS’ published policy. A copy of the Reconsideration and Appeals Policy is available from the ABS office or website (www.absurgery.org) to any individual considering a request for reconsideration or an appeal. A request for reconsideration, which is the first step, must be made in writing to the ABS office within 90 days of receipt of notice from the ABS of the action in question.

G. Sanction of Certificate
Certification by the American Board of Surgery may be subject to sanction, such as revocation or suspension, at any time that the directors shall determine, in their sole judgment, that the diplomate holding the certification was in some respect not properly qualified to receive it or is no longer properly qualified to retain it. A copy of the Revocation Policy is available from the ABS office or website.

H. Special Circumstances
1. Persons with Disabilities
The American Board of Surgery complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act by making a reasonable effort to provide modifications in its examination process to examination applicants with documented disabilities. These modifications are appropriate for such disabilities but do not alter the measurement of the skills or knowledge that the examination process is intended to test. The ABS has adopted a specific policy and procedure regarding examination of such applicants, which is available from the ABS office or website (www.absurgery.org). Any disability which an applicant believes requires modification of the administration of an examination must be identified and documented by the applicant in accordance with this policy. All materials submitted to the ABS documenting such a disability must be received by the published application deadline for the examination in question.

2. Examination Irregularities and Unethical Behavior
Examination irregularities, e.g., cheating in any form or other unethical behavior, by an applicant or diplomate may result in the barring of the individual from examination on a temporary or permanent basis, the denial or revocation of a certificate, and/or other appropriate actions, up to and including legal prosecution. Determination of sanctions will be at the sole discretion of the ABS.
(See also www.absurgery.org for complete ABS Ethics and Professionalism Policy)

3. Substance Abuse
Applicants with a history of substance abuse will not be admitted to any examination unless they present evidence satisfactory to the ABS that they have successfully completed the program of treatment prescribed for their condition. The ABS additionally must be satisfied that they are currently free of substance abuse.
II. REQUIREMENTS FOR RECERTIFICATION

A. General Requirements

Applicants must:

1. Be certified by the ABS in the specialty and have a certificate that will expire in three years or less. Certification may not be currently revoked.

2. Have a currently registered full and unrestricted license to practice medicine in the United States or Canada. Applicants outside the U.S./Canada must maintain a full and unrestricted license in the country where they practice.
   A diplomate must immediately inform the ABS of any conditions or restrictions in force on any active medical license he or she holds in any state or province. When there is a restriction or condition in force on any of the diplomate’s medical licenses, the Credentials Committee of the ABS will determine whether the diplomate satisfies the above licensure requirement.

3. Have an ethical, professional and moral status acceptable to the ABS.

4. Be in the active practice and/or teaching and/or research and/or administrative activities relevant to the surgical specialty. If the diplomate is providing care to hospitalized patients, he or she must hold practice privileges at an accredited health care institution. If a diplomate does not hold privileges for whatever reason, he or she must provide explanation on the application form.

5. Receive a satisfactory evaluation as to surgical qualifications by both the current chief of surgery and the chair of credentials/privileges committee at the hospital where the majority of practice privileges are exercised. If the diplomate holds one of these positions or if these positions are held by the same person, another surgeon of comparable rank should complete the second reference form. (For recertification in surgery of the hand, a satisfactory evaluation from two surgeons in the community is required.)

6. Be in good standing in the profession as evidenced by membership in the local medical/surgical society, fellowship in the American College of Surgeons (ACS), or membership in other regional or national surgical associations. If an applicant does not belong to any medical or surgical societies, he or she must provide explanation on the application form.

B. Continuing Education Requirements

Diplomates applying for recertification in general surgery, vascular surgery, pediatric surgery and surgical critical care must present evidence that they have engaged in 60 hours of Category I continuing medical education (CME) relevant to their practice during the past two calendar years or recent 24-month period prior to their application.

Category I activities are formal educational activities accredited by the ACCME, AMA, RCPSC or EACCME. They have specific educational objectives and present content appropriate in depth and scope for the intended physician audience. Such activities may include lectures, grand rounds and departmental scientific meetings. See www.absurgery.org for CME resources.

Category I activities must be listed on the application form and supported by documentation sent to the ABS office, i.e., photocopies of certificates from the activity sponsor clearly stating it is Category I and accredited by the ACCME, AMA, RCPSC or EACCME. Please note the Physician’s Recognition Award itself is not considered acceptable documentation.

Diplomates may also transfer their CME data directly from the ACS or SAGES. Documentation must then only be submitted for any non-verified Category I CME listed.

Certification Credit: The ABS will waive the 60 hours of Category I CME for applicants who have achieved certification/recertification in the past two years or recent 24 months. If applicants have passed
a similar exam given by another ABMS board, that will also count as 60 hours, but they must obtain the Category I CME credits from the AMA as documentation—see www.ama-assn.org/go/directcredit.

C. Operative Experience Requirements
For recertification in general surgery, vascular surgery and pediatric surgery, diplomates must submit as a practice profile an operative experience report covering the most recent 12-month period or calendar year immediately prior to application, reflecting experience at the two hospitals where the diplomate practices the most. The ABS operative report or ACS case log system may be used for this purpose. Diplomates are only required to enter their case numbers for each category; no other information is requested. Only primary procedures need to be listed.

For recertification in surgical critical care, diplomates must submit a practice profile that documents management of 25 consecutive patients cared for just prior to the time of application, who had an ICU stay of more than 24 hours.

D. Clinically Inactive Diplomates
Diplomates who are no longer in active practice and do not treat patients in any capacity may apply for recertification and fulfill all application and eligibility requirements. In lieu of the regular reference letters and operative report, diplomates should submit two attestation letters from supervisors or peers knowledgeable about their work, and a cover letter with a full description of their current activities.

Upon successful completion of an MOC examination, a diplomate will be deemed “Certified – Clinically Inactive” and receive a certificate so stating. Once recertified, these diplomates will have to participate in all parts of the ABS MOC Program except Part 4, Evaluation of Performance in Practice, in order to maintain their certification.

Diplomates with the Certified – Clinically Inactive status who decide to return to active practice will be required to submit information regarding their return to clinical activity and fulfill additional requirements based on the diplomate’s particular circumstances.

E. Applying for Recertification
Diplomates previously certified by the ABS who believe that they meet the requirements outlined above may apply for recertification and have their applications evaluated. If approved, they will be admitted to the specific MOC examination. The online application process is posted on the ABS website each year in early spring. Further information on application requirements and the application process is available from the ABS website, www.absurgery.org.
III. THE MOC (RECERTIFICATION) EXAMINATIONS

A. Admissibility
A diplomate is admissible to an examination when all requirements of the ABS currently in force at the time of receipt of the formal application, and/or such other requirements as the ABS may specify in special cases, have been fulfilled and all credentials, including practice profiles and surgical qualifications, have been reviewed and deemed acceptable.

B. Examination Format
The ABS MOC examinations are offered annually as computer-based examinations and consist of multiple-choice questions designed to assess a diplomate’s cognitive knowledge and clinical judgment. Examinations are developed by committees consisting of ABS directors and experienced diplomates in the specialty area. The examinations are approximately five hours in length (six hours for vascular surgery) and are held at computer-testing facilities across the U.S.

Information regarding examination dates and fees, as well as examination content outlines, is available at www.absurgery.org. Examination results are mailed and posted on the website approximately four weeks after the examination.

C. Opportunities and Readmissibility
Upon application approval, diplomates taking examinations in general surgery, vascular surgery, pediatric surgery or surgical critical care are given a maximum of five opportunities within a five-year period to pass the examination. Diplomates recertifying in surgery of the hand are given three opportunities within a five-year period. The five-year exam admissibility period is independent of a diplomate’s certificate expiration date.

If a diplomate decides not to take the exam in a given year, it is a lost opportunity as the five-year limit is absolute. During the five-year period, examinees who postponed or were unsuccessful will be contacted regarding the next exam; a new application is not necessary during this period.

Readmissibility-Lapsed Certificates: Diplomates who exhausted their five-year exam admissibility period or who allowed their certificate to lapse must meet all current application requirements in effect when applying for an MOC examination. They will also be subject to an audit of their MOC form once they complete their first three-year MOC cycle.
IV. MAINTENANCE OF CERTIFICATION

Maintenance of Certification is a program of continuous professional development created by the ABS in conjunction with the American Board of Medical Specialties and its 23 other member boards. MOC, which replaces the ABS’ previous recertification requirements, is intended to document to the public and the health care community the ongoing commitment of diplomates to lifelong learning and quality care.

MOC consists of four parts to be fulfilled over the 10-year certification cycle: 1) professional standing; 2) lifelong learning and self-assessment; 3) cognitive expertise; and 4) evaluation of performance in practice. MOC is an evolving process; the requirements outlined below will be modified as new learning and assessment tools are developed. The ABS intends for its MOC requirements to be as flexible as possible to allow diplomates to satisfy them in the way most compatible with their practice environment.

MOC requirements run in three-year cycles. A secure examination is also required at 10-year intervals.

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<th>MOC PART</th>
<th>ABS REQUIREMENT</th>
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| 1. Professional Standing                      | • Possession of a valid, full and unrestricted medical license  
• Maintenance of privileges in the specialty, if clinically active  
• Submission of hospital references every three years—the chief of surgery and chair of credentials/privileges committee at the institution most work is performed |
| 2. Lifelong Learning and Self-Assessment      | • Continuing medical education (CME)—a minimum of 90 hours of Category I CME to be completed over a three-year cycle. CME must be relevant to the surgeon’s practice. CME completed for state licensing requirements is acceptable  
• At least 60 of the 90 hours must include a self-assessment activity—a written or electronic question-and-answer exercise that assesses the surgeon’s understanding of the material presented in the CME program  
• A score of 75% or higher must be attained on the self-assessment exercise. There is no minimum number of questions and repeated attempts are allowed  
• Diplomates who achieve certification/recertification may waive up to 60 hours of CME/self-assessment; this includes the one that enrolls you in MOC |
| 3. Cognitive Expertise                         | • Successful completion of a secure examination in the specialty. Diplomates may first apply for the exam three years before their certificate’s expiration. A full application is required, including a 12-month operative log, reference forms and evidence of CME. Diplomates must be in compliance with MOC requirements to apply  
• For diplomates who hold more than one certificate, this is the only requirement that must be repeated for each specialty |
| 4. Evaluation of Performance in Practice       | • Participation in a national, regional or local surgical outcomes database or quality assessment program. Programs such as NSQIP and the ACS case log system meet this requirement. (See www.absurgery.org for some other acceptable programs) |

Diplomates in MOC must report to the ABS at three-year intervals about Parts 1, 2 and 4 by completing an online form. Individuals who do not report to the ABS or otherwise fail to fulfill the requirements of MOC will be reported as not meeting MOC requirements and will face additional requirements to re-enter MOC. They also cannot certify or recertify in any ABS specialty until all MOC requirements are met.

Diplomates may track their MOC status using their personalized MOC Timeline at www.absurgery.org. Diplomates who hold multiple ABS certificates should report at three-year intervals according to the certification or recertification that initially enrolled them in MOC.

Please refer to the ABS website, www.absurgery.org, for additional details and resources regarding MOC. To assure receipt of materials pertaining to MOC, diplomates should notify the ABS of any changes of address.

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