

FamilyPractice.com

Since its founding in 1969, the American Board of Family Practice (ABFP) has remained resolute in maintaining high standards in its examinations for certification and recertification. During these 30 years, the ABFP has been looked to for its leadership in the development and utilization of cutting-edge technology for its examinations, policies, and procedures. For the last 10 years, the Board and its subsidiary, Assessment Technologies Incorporated (ATI), have kept pace by developing and implementing computer-based testing and administration systems.

Much of the success in keeping pace with new technology is directly related to the dedicated members of the Board and its staff. Each member takes great pride in searching for a more comprehensive method to better assess and evaluate the family physician's knowledge.

In 1997, the Board began to research the viability of the Internet and how it might be used to serve and support family physicians and their patients. Early on it became apparent that even though the Board and its staff had the medical knowledge and database expertise, the pace at which the Internet, its technology, and supporting software were developing and expanding demanded that they would need to work with an outside resource. After extensive reviews, the Board entered into a joint venture with Kurzweil Technologies, Inc., to form Medical Learning Company, Inc. (MLCI).

Kurzweil Technologies, founded by Ray Kurzweil, is a leading developer of advanced software technologies. Mr. Kurzweil and his associates have a number of technology "firsts" to their credit, including, among others, optical character recognition, the first print-to-speech reading machine for the blind, the first computer music synthesizer that could recreate acoustic instruments, and the first commercially marketed large vocabulary speech recognition.

One initiative developed by the ABFP and Kurzweil Technologies is the FamilyPractice.com Web site, a site where family physicians and their patients can obtain up-to-date medical information.

The Board will continue to maintain its official Web site, www.abfp.org. The purpose of this site is to provide current information regarding certification and recertification procedures and policies.

FamilyPractice.com Mission

The FamilyPractice.com mission (formerly known as FamilyMed.com) is to provide family physicians with the advanced, yet easy-to-use, tools and knowledge needed to provide the highest quality medical care to their patients. By providing the latest in research information, educational modules, reference guides, and decision-support tools, it is the goal of FamilyPractice.com to make a positive contribution to health care throughout the United States and the world.

What Does FamilyPractice.com Offer the Family Physician?

FamilyPractice.com offers a comprehensive on-line resource devoted exclusively to family physicians. It provides the family physician not only multimedia tools for sharpening diagnostic skills but also the ABFP's authoritative reference and resource materials. It also offers physicians easy access to clinical and research journals, such as *JABFP*, links to medical and general news resources, nearly 2,000 questions from past in-training examinations (along with detailed answers and references), and links to the full text of more than 30 leading clinical and research journals. The in-training questions will soon be qualified for up to 25 hours of continuing medical education (CME) credit. FamilyPractice.com is the only site to offer the latest editions of ABFP's 19 reference guides, which have been specifically enhanced with links to references, lexicons, flowcharts, and decision support modules. ABFP diplomates can also register to become part of the National Registry of Family Physicians.

Unique to FamilyPractice.com is HeartLab,TM a multimedia cardiac auscultation simulator. HeartLabTM contains a comprehensive cardiovascular learning experience complete with actual heart

sounds. HeartLab™ also gives physicians the opportunity to hone their skills by listening to and diagnosing unknown sounds.

FamilyPractice.com will feature virtual patient encounters that allow physicians to make a diagnosis and recommend a course of treatment. Each case includes a patient visit comprising a history, review of systems, a physical examination, and studies that include such graphics as films, electrocardiogram strips, and laboratory results. Physicians can then formulate a unique treatment and management plan for each patient. This technology is similar to that being developed by the ABFP for recertification purposes. FamilyPractice.com will provide answers and supporting information.

ABFP-certified physicians are also eligible to create a free Web site and e-mail on FamilyPractice.com. This service allows patients to search a physician's Web site and learn more about the physician and his or her practice. Patients can then make an informed choice as they select a family physician.

What Will FamilyPractice.com Offer the Patient?

Patients seeking a family physician can search a database of ABFP diplomates for a qualified physician in their area. Patients can also review more personalized information about physicians and their practice by viewing the FamilyPractice.com physician Web sites. Family physicians can also refer patients to the patient education section for a high-level overview of medical information being developed. FamilyPractice.com will continue to add high-quality patient information from reputable resources. This service is extremely beneficial because of the tremendous amount of misinformation that currently exists on the Internet. The communication between physician and patient can be enhanced dramatically when the content of the research is known to come from the same, reliable, and credible source.

What Makes FamilyPractice.com Different From Other Medical Web Sites?

FamilyPractice.com is a comprehensive online resource that offers family physicians clinical, educational, and interactive resources specifically focused on the medical specialty of family medicine. FamilyPractice.com is a virtual community dedicated to family practice and to enhancing the quality of patient care. This new Web site offers physicians and patients an increasing number of resources and tools for news, education, and information.

Other Beneficial Possibilities

The potential of the FamilyPractice.com Web site is unlimited. Currently, we are investigating the potential use of this site to provide an interactive forum with other physicians regarding difficult diagnoses, CME, and family practice management programs. We are also exploring a primary care virtual lecture series for family physicians to view lectures on important clinical topics and to get CME in addition to transcription services and timely position-specific classified advertising.

Dr. Robert Avánt, Executive Director of the ABFP, states, "The potential for FamilyPractice.com to benefit the family physician and their patients is significant. It is estimated that there are 22.3 million people a year who look for information on the Internet for health-related matters. Additionally, studies show that physician usage of the Internet has increased almost 300% during the last 2 years. It is critically important for the ABFP and the family practice community to provide credible and accessible online information for both physicians and patients." He continues, "Family physicians want the Internet to help make them be more productive. The chances are excellent that this will happen because FamilyPractice.com is a site developed by family physicians for family physicians and their patients."