

BOARD NEWS

Clinical Informatics as an Option for American Board of Family Medicine Diplomates

Michael D. Hagen, MD, and Anneli Cochran, MPH

The American Board of Medical Specialties approved in 2011 the offering of a new subcertificate in Clinical Informatics, with the American Board of Preventive Medicine (ABPM) and the American Board of Pathology (ABPath) serving as the sponsoring boards.¹ All American Board of Medical Specialties member board Diplomates in good standing with their primary boards can qualify to sit for this new certificate, including American Board of Family Medicine–certified family physicians! ABPM and ABPath provide 2 pathways to qualify for the certificate: (1) completion of a nonaccredited Informatics fellowship training program (accreditation was not available before the creation of the new certificate) or (2) evidence of substantial informatics practice in the 3 years before applying for the certificate (practice eligibility pathway, which will close in 5 years). Those who qualify through one of these pathways may then sit for the certification examination. The first test was administered in October 2013; 456 candidates successfully passed the examination, thus becoming certified Clinical Informaticists.²

By matching name, city, and state of the ABPM candidates (only certified pathologists could access the examination offered by ABPath), we identified 80 American Board of Family Medicine–certified family physicians who now hold Clinical Informatics certificates. What do these new family physician Informatics Diplomates look like? Table 1 provides a glimpse of these new specialists’ characteristics.

Table 1. Characteristics of American Board of Family Medicine (ABFM) Informatics Diplomates

ABFM Diplomate Characteristics	
Age, years (n = 80)	
Mean (SD)	49 (8.2)
Range	35–64
Sex (n = 80), n (%)	
Female	21 (26)
Male	59 (74)
Medical school faculty (n = 66), n	
Full time	8
Part time	27
Time spent in administration (n = 66), %	
Mean (SD)	26.27 (33)
Range	0–100
Practice organization (n = 63), n (%)	
Administration	5 (8)
Educator (other than FM)	1 (2)
Full-time educator (FM)	7 (11)
Government	5 (8)
Group	21 (33)
HMO	2 (3)
Independent (solo)	4 (6)
Industrial	3 (5)
Other	11 (17)

HMO, health maintenance organization; FM, family medicine; SD, standard deviation.

Interestingly, approximately 42% indicate employment in clinical practice contexts. We do not have information regarding how many of these Diplomates have undergone formal informatics training (fellowship and/or degree programs) since they applied for the certificate through the ABPM. Respondents indicated spending, on average, 27% of their time in administrative tasks but with marked variability; we do not have a further breakdown of this percentage regarding how much time the respondents actually spend in informatics-related activities.

Clinical informatics represents a new career path for board-certified family physicians. We will watch with interest how this option develops over time.

Submitted 18 August 2014; *revised* 18 August 2014; *accepted* 21 August 2014.

From The American Board of Family Medicine, Lexington, KY.

Funding: none.

Conflict of interest: MDH serves as Senior Vice President of the ABFM. AC is a research assistant at the ABFM.

Corresponding author: Michael D. Hagen, MD, The American Board of Family Medicine, 1648 McGrathiana Parkway, Suite 550, Lexington, KY 40511 (E-mail: hagen@theabfm.org).

References

1. Shortliffe EH. President's column: subspecialty certification in clinical informatics. *J Am Med Inform Assoc* 2011;18:890–1.
2. Detmer DE, Shortliffe EH. Clinical informatics: prospects for a new medical subspecialty. *JAMA* 2014; 311:2067–8.