ABD Micrographic Dermatologic Surgery (MDS) Subspecialty Certification

Questions & Answers

The American Board of Dermatology notified the ABMS of its intent to submit an application to offer a subspecialty certificate in Micrographic Dermatologic Surgery (MDS), which would grant approval to certify those individuals trained in MDS.

Why is ABD pursuing a subspecialty certification in MDS?

Micrographic dermatologic surgery is a well-established subspecialty of dermatology. The Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) has 77 participating training programs in Micrographic Surgery and Dermatologic Oncology. Yet, the fellowship is one of a very small number among the 140+ ACGME fellowships that lacks a related subspecialty certification. Individuals who complete the fellowship training do so without the acknowledgement and validation of a subspecialty certificate, unlike their peers in pediatric dermatology or dermatopathology. We believe that the time has come to recognize the efforts of these fellowship trained dermatologists.

Were the opinions of practicing dermatologists considered prior to making this decision?

The Board solicited feedback about the potential for subspecialty certification from dermatologists representing diverse backgrounds, including general dermatologists, dermatologists who certified in other subspecialties, Mohs surgeons who are ACGME fellowship-trained and those who are not. The Board reviewed the feedback, and after careful consideration, voted unanimously to move forward. The Board's 17 Directors include general dermatologists, pediatric dermatologists, dermatopathologists, dermatologic surgeons and a public member.

Why is the name for the new subspecialty (Micrographic Dermatologic Surgery) different than the fellowship (Micrographic Surgery and Dermatologic Oncology)?

The feedback solicited from diplomates indicated discomfort over the inclusion of the word 'oncology,' which some felt could mislead people to think that general dermatologists do not treat skin cancer. Certainly, they do.

What is the process for establishing a new dermatologic subspecialty?

The American Board of Dermatology will submit an application to the ABMS requesting the creation of a new subspecialty in Micrographic Dermatologic Surgery. As with all such subspecialty filings, there will be a public comment period this summer with an ABMS decision anticipated in late 2018.

Who will be eligible for the subspecialty certification?

The American Board of Dermatology is proposing to the ABMS that candidates for the Micrographic Dermatologic Surgery subspecialty must:

1. Possess a current, valid, full and unrestricted license to practice medicine or osteopathy in at least one state or province within the United States or Canada;
2. Hold primary certification in general dermatology from ABD;
3. Be up to date in Maintenance of Certification (MOC) if certification by ABD is time-limited;
4. Demonstrate experience in the subspecialty by:
   
   successfully completing the ACGME-approved MSDO fellowship
   
   OR
   
   during an initial 5-year practice pathway eligibility period only, attesting to practicing micrographic surgery;

5. Pass the MDS certification examination.
What does this mean for lifetime certificate holders?

Individuals who hold lifetime certificates in dermatology and who become certified in MDS will continue to have lifetime certification in general dermatology, but will have a time-limited, 10-year certification in MDS. Maintaining certification in MDS requires participating in MOC for the subspecialty only; the General Dermatology module of the MOC exam is not required to maintain the MDS certificate.

When is the first certification exam?

The American Board of Dermatology anticipates the first certification exam will likely take place in 2020.

Where and how is the exam administered?

The Micrographic Dermatologic Surgery subspecialty certification exam will be a proctored test, administered at Pearson VUE testing centers nationwide.

What is the cost?

The exam fee has not yet been set. Similar to the fee for general dermatology and existing subspecialties in pediatric dermatology and dermatopathology, the exam fee for MDS will cover the exam itself and administration costs (i.e., electronic item bank, psychometrics quality control and scoring, registration software) associated with managing a new certification.

What happens to general dermatology Maintenance of Certification?

For dermatologists who have time-limited certification in both general dermatology and MDS, maintaining the certifications will require passing an additional MOC exam module in the subspecialty once every 10 years. There are otherwise no additional MOC requirements.

NOTE: The ABD’s launch of the CertLink longitudinal assessment platform in 2020 will offer diplomates flexible options for fulfilling their primary and subspecialty MOC Examination requirements.

What if I practice Mohs, but choose not to pursue certification in the subspecialty?

Certification is a voluntary process. Any Mohs surgeon who chooses not to become certified in Micrographic Dermatologic Surgery will not be penalized by ABD in any way. However, only dermatologists who become MDS certified will be able to call themselves certified by ABD in MDS.