

Requirements for Recognition of Dental Specialties and National Certifying Boards for Dental Specialists

Adopted as Amended by the ADA House of Delegates, October 2009

Introduction

A specialty is an area of dentistry that has been formally recognized by the American Dental Association as meeting the "Requirements for Recognition of Dental Specialists" specified in this document. Dental specialties are recognized by the Association to protect the public, nurture the art and science of dentistry, and improve the quality of care. It is the Association's belief that the needs of the public are best served if the profession is oriented primarily to general practice. Specialties are recognized in those areas where advanced knowledge and skills are essential to maintain or restore oral health.¹

Not all areas in dentistry will satisfy the requirements for specialty recognition. However, the public and profession benefit substantially when non-specialty groups develop and advance areas of interest through education, practice and research. The contributions of such groups are acknowledged by the profession and their endeavors are encouraged.

The sponsoring organization must submit to the Council on Dental Education and Licensure a formal application which demonstrates compliance with all the requirements for specialty recognition. The Council will submit its recommendation for approval or denial of the proposed specialty to the Association's House of Delegates.

Following approval by the House of Delegates, the sponsoring organization must establish a national board for certifying diplomates in accordance with the "Requirements for National Certifying Boards for Dental Specialists" as specified in this document. Additionally, the Commission on Dental Accreditation develops educational requirements and establishes an accreditation program for advanced educational programs in the specialty. The Council on Dental Education and Licensure and the sponsoring organization monitors the administrative standards and operation of the certifying board.

¹ Association policies regarding ethical announcement of specialization and limitation of practice are contained in the *ADA Principles of Ethics and Code of Professional Conduct*.

Requirements for Recognition of Dental Specialties

A sponsoring organization seeking specialty recognition for an area must document that the discipline satisfies all the requirements specified in this section.

- (1) In order for an area to be recognized as a specialty, it must be represented by a sponsoring organization: (a) whose membership is reflective of the special area of dental practice; and (b) that demonstrates the ability to establish a certifying board.
- (2) A proposed specialty must be a distinct and well-defined field which requires unique knowledge and skills beyond those commonly possessed by dental school graduates as defined by the predoctoral accreditation standards.²
- (3) The scope of the proposed specialty requires advanced knowledge and skills that: (a) are separate and distinct from any recognized dental specialty or combination of recognized dental specialties; and (b) cannot be accommodated through minimal modification of a recognized dental specialty or combination of recognized dental specialties.
- (4) The specialty applicant must document scientifically, by valid and reliable statistical evidence/studies, that it: (a) actively contributes to new knowledge in the field; (b) actively contributes to professional education; (c) actively contributes to research needs of the profession; and (d) provides oral health services for the public; all of which are currently not being met by general practitioners or dental specialists.
- (5) A proposed specialty must directly benefit some aspect of clinical patient care.
- (6) Formal advanced education programs of at least two years beyond the predoctoral dental curriculum as defined by the Commission on Dental Accreditation must exist to provide the special knowledge and skills required for practice of the proposed specialty.

² Predoctoral accreditation standards are contained in the Commission on Dental Accreditation's document Accreditation Standards for Dental Education Programs.

Requirements for Recognition of National Certifying Boards for Dental Specialists

In order to become, and remain, eligible for recognition by the American Dental Association as a national certifying board for a special area of practice, the area shall have a sponsoring or parent organization whose membership is reflective of the recognized special area of dental practice. A close working relationship shall be maintained between the parent organization and the board. Additionally, the following requirements must be fulfilled.

Organization of Boards:

- (1) Each Board shall have no less than five or more than 12 voting directors designated on a rotation basis in accordance with a method approved by the Council on Dental Education and Licensure. Although the Council does not prescribe a single method for selecting directors of boards, members may not serve for more than a total of nine years. Membership on the board shall be in accordance with a prescribed method endorsed by the sponsoring organization. All board directors shall be diplomates of that board and only the parent organizations of boards may establish additional qualifications if they so desire.
- (2) Each board shall submit in writing to the Council on Dental Education and Licensure a program sufficiently comprehensive in scope to meet the requirements established by the American Dental Association for the operation of a certifying board. This statement should include evidence of sponsorship of the board by a national organization representing dental practitioners interested in that special area of practice.
- (3) Each board shall submit to the Council on Dental Education and Licensure evidence of adequate financial support to conduct its program of certification.
- (4) Each board may select suitable consultants or agencies to assist in its operations, such as the preparation and administration of examinations and the evaluation of records and examinations of candidates. Consultants who participate in clinical examinations should be diplomates.

Operation of Boards:

- (1) Each board shall certify qualified dentists as diplomates only in the special area of dental practice approved by the American Dental Association for such certification. No more than one board shall be recognized by the Association for the certification of diplomates in a single area of practice.
- (2) Each board, except by waiver of the Council on Dental Education and Licensure, shall give at least one examination in each calendar year and shall announce such examination at least six months in advance.
- (3) Each board shall maintain a current list of its diplomates.
- (4) Each board shall submit annually to the Council on Dental Education and Licensure data relative to its financial operations, applicant admission and examination procedures, and results thereof. A diplomate may, upon request, obtain a copy of the annual financial report of the board.
- (5) Each board shall encourage its diplomates to engage in lifelong learning and continuous quality improvement.
- (6) Each board shall provide periodically to the Council on Dental Education and Licensure evidence of its examination and certification of a significant number of additional dentists in order to warrant its continuing approval by the American Dental Association.
- (7) Each board shall bear full responsibility for the conduct of its program, the evaluation of the qualifications and competence of those it certifies as diplomates, and the issuance of certificates.
- (8) Each board shall require an annual registration fee from each of its diplomates intended to assist in supporting financially the continued program of the board.

Certification Requirements:

- (1) Each board shall use, in the evaluation of its candidates, standards of education and experience approved by the Commission on Dental Accreditation.

- (2) Each board shall require, for eligibility for certification as a diplomate, the successful completion of an educational program accredited by the Commission on Dental Accreditation of two or more academic years in length, as specified by the Commission.³

Although desirable, the period of advanced study need not be continuous, nor completed within successive calendar years. An advanced educational program equivalent to two academic years in length, successfully completed on a part-time basis over an extended period of time as a graduated sequence of educational experience not exceeding four calendar years, may be considered acceptable in satisfying this requirement. Short continuation and refresher courses and teaching experience in specialty departments in dental schools will not be accepted in meeting any portion of this requirement.

Each board may establish an exception to the qualification requirement of completion of an advanced specialty education program accredited by the Commission on Dental Accreditation for the unique candidate who has not met this requirement per se, but can demonstrate to the satisfaction of the certifying board, equivalent advanced specialty education. A certifying board must petition the Council on Dental Education and Licensure for permission to establish such a policy. If granted, the provisions of the certifying board's policy shall be reported to the House of Delegates in the Annual Report of the Council on Dental Education and Licensure.

- (3) Each board shall establish its minimum requirements for years of practice in the area for which it grants certificates. The years of advanced education in this area may be accepted toward fulfillment of this requirement.
- (4) Each board, in cooperation with its parent organization, shall prepare and publicize its recommendations on the educational program and experience requirements which candidates will be expected to meet.

³ The following interpretation for educational eligibility was provided by the 1975 House of Delegates of the American Dental Association (*Trans.*1975: 690) and amended by 2009 House of Delegates. (*Trans.*2009:xxx)

Candidates for board certification who graduated after January 1, 1967, must have successfully completed an accredited advanced specialty program. Candidates for board certification who completed the prescribed length of education for board certification in a program of an institution then listed by the Council on Dental Education and Licensure prior to 1967, and who have announced ethically limitation of practice in one of the recognized dental specialties, are considered educationally qualified.

Founding Boards and Waivers: Members of a founding board in an area of practice not recognized previously by the American Dental Association shall be exempt from certifying examination. Newly recognized boards may petition the Council on Dental Education and Licensure for permission to waive the formal education requirements for candidates who apply for examination. If granted, the provisions of the waiver shall be reported to the House of Delegates in the Annual Report of the Council on Dental Education and Licensure.