CC Committee Chair Message

The Evolution of CertLink: From Launch to Today

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For many years, diplomates-maintained board certification through a "high-stakes, low-frequency" system that required a lengthy, day-long exam at a secure testing center. Diplomates often spent months reviewing extensive material to demonstrate competence and maintain certification.

This model became outdated for assessing the competencies needed by modern physicians. The American Board of Nuclear Medicine (ABNM), following updated American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) guidelines, moved away from the 10-year exam for several reasons:

- Medical science, particularly nuclear medicine and molecular imaging, evolves too rapidly to be captured by a 10-year timeline. With the rapid emergence of new radiopharmaceuticals, theranostic protocols, and imaging advancements, a diplomate's knowledge could become outdated long before their decade was completed.
- Educational research shows that high-stress, single-day exams mainly encourage short-term memorization rather than lasting knowledge. In contrast, spaced repetition is more effective for integrating information into clinical practice.
- The 10-year exam often covered topics infrequently encountered in daily clinical practice. Additionally, the previous system required physicians to take multiple days off work and invest significant financial resources in preparatory courses, contributing to increased professional burnout.

The ABNM officially launched the CertLink® pilot project in January 2018, in collaboration with the ABMS, as an alternative to the traditional Maintenance of Certification (MOC) exam, now called the Continuing Certification (CC) exam. Grounded in adult learning theory, CertLink aimed to deliver continuous, incremental education rather than relying on infrequent, intensive study sessions. Instead of a 10-year interval between assessments, diplomates receive high-quality, image-rich, and clinically relevant questions regularly. This approach allows physicians to immediately access detailed explanations and references, transforming a former administrative requirement into an effective tool for identifying and addressing gaps in clinical knowledge.

The pilot phase concluded in 2021 after three years of data collection and evaluation, with overwhelmingly positive results. Due to its proven validity and popularity, the ABNM made CertLink a permanent part of its CC program in 2021. The platform was then expanded to include residents and fellows through CertLink In-Training, which helps them prepare for the certification exam by identifying strengths and weaknesses.

CertLink is now the established standard for diplomate demonstration of current medical knowledge and judgement in nuclear medicine continuing certification. The prior half-day continuing certification examination remains an option for those diplomates not meeting CertLink requirements. Starting in 2025, diplomates began receiving five-year renewal certificates rather than the previous ten-year certificates in compliance with revision of ABMS Standards for Continuing Certification.

Currently, maintaining active certification requires consistent participation through the ABNM CertLink platform. Diplomates must meet CC requirements throughout their five-year cycle to remain publicly listed as "Certified" on the ABMS Certification Matters web portal. Enrollment timelines are now standardized, and all specialists who complete initial certification are automatically transitioned to CertLink. CertLink's evolution from a web-based pilot to the foundation of nuclear medicine competency assessment reflects a broader shift in medicine toward continuous, lifelong learning.