



# *American Osteopathic Board of Surgery*

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## PROTOCOL FOR OSTEOPATHIC CONTINUOUS CERTIFICATION (OCC)

### **The objectives and purposes of the American Osteopathic Board of Surgery (AOBS) are to:**

1. To define the qualifications required of the osteopathic physician for certification, recertification and OCC, in the surgical specialties assigned to the Board by the Board of Trustees of the American Osteopathic Association (AOA).
2. Determine the standards of education, formal training and practice required for certification, recertification and OCC in the surgical specialties assigned to the Board.
3. Establish procedures for the conduct of examination at least once a year for primary certification. Recertification for primary certification and certification of added qualification examinations will be made available twice annually.
4. Provide and issue certificates for primary and recertification in all specialty(s) assigned to the Board.
5. Recommend to the Bureau of Osteopathic Specialists the revocation of certificates for cause.
6. Use every means possible to maintain a high standard of practice within the osteopathic profession.

### REQUIREMENTS FOR OCC

Osteopathic Continuous Certification (OCC) is the board recertification process that ensures that osteopathic diplomates under the jurisdiction of the AOBS with time-limited certification are current in their specialty. The OCC process will include a method of evaluating the diplomate's competencies, knowledge and medical/surgical practice skills.

Diplomates with time-limited certification who are in an academic or administrative position, and are not clinically caring for patients, must participate in Components #1, #2, and #5 of the OCC process as outlined below. However, should the diplomate decide to return to practice (part-time or full-time), they must submit proof of 25 hours of 1A CME in the specialty in the first year and take the recertification examination at the first available administration.

Diplomates with unlimited (lifetime) certification may voluntarily participate in the OCC process. If a diplomate with a lifetime certification is required by a state licensing board or an outside entity (insurance provider) to participate in maintenance of certification/OCC, the diplomate will be required to complete all components of the OCC process.

## OCC Process

The AOBS OCC process will be composed of five (5) documentation components (see full description of these components below):

- #1: Unrestricted state/jurisdictional military licensure
- #2: Lifelong learning (continuing medical education)
- #3: Cognitive assessment (written recertification examination)
- #4: Practice performance (clinical and surgical assessment, self-evaluation, and demonstration of surgical practice improvement)
- #5: Continuous (uninterrupted) AOA Membership

The AOBS OCC process will be required to be completed over a nine (9) year period, and will be repeated every (9) years, beginning January 1, 2013.

The OCC process requirements as published below are a work in progress.

### Component #1: Unrestricted State/Jurisdictional Military Licensure

Each diplomate will be required to maintain a valid and unrestricted state license in all states where the diplomate holds a license, or valid and unrestricted jurisdictional military license. The AOBS will require that the diplomate provide proof of valid and unrestricted license annually. The AOBS will conduct random verifications at least once every other year of 25% of the diplomates in the OCC process. If at the time of licensure verification a diplomate has a restricted license (as defined by the AOA), the diplomate must submit an update every six (6) months until the restriction has been lifted.

### Component #2: Lifelong Learning

During each three (3) year Continuing Medical Education (CME) cycle, each diplomate must fulfill the AOA required 120 hours, of which 30 must be Category 1A, and 50 must be Category 1 or 2 primary specialty credit hours as defined by the AOBS. A list of AOBS approved specialty courses will be posted on the AOBS website at [www.aobs.org](http://www.aobs.org). The AOBS strongly recommends that each diplomate attend at least one (1) ACOS Annual Clinical Assembly in every three (3) year CME period. The AOBS will require that the diplomate submit a copy of the AOA CME report at least once every three (3) year CME period. Diplomates

who do not fulfill the CME requirements as outlined above will be required to submit in writing a corrective action plan, and will be expected to fulfill the requirement within the first year of the next CME cycle.

### Component #3: Cognitive Assessment

Each diplomate will be required to take and pass a written recertification examination before the expiration of the time-limited certificate. The AOBS will offer recertification written examinations twice a year. Diplomates may begin taking the recertification examination two years prior to the expiration date of the certificate, allowing six (6) opportunities to pass the examination. A diplomate may take the recertification examination as many times as it is given prior to the expiration of the certificate. (Example: A diplomate's original certificate was issue April 2004, and expires April 2014. The 2014 recertification examination is being offered in April; therefore the last opportunity to take the written examination prior to expiration would be Fall of 2013. The diplomate in this example could take the first of the six examination opportunities in April 2011, second in the Fall of 2011, etc.).

If the diplomate passes the written recertification examination in a year prior to the year the certificate expires, the passing grade will be held and reported to the AOA on the year of expiration, thus maintaining the 10-year time period of certification. The new certificate will be valid for ten (10) years from the date of expiration of the original certificate.

Any diplomate whose time-limited certificate has expired may enter the recertification examination process at any time, provided the diplomate meets all the other OCC requirements. Upon successfully completing the written recertification examination, the diplomate will be issued a time-dated certificate for ten (10) years, dated from the date of passing the written recertification examination.

Upon failure of the first recertification examination, the diplomate must provide documentation of 15 hours of current\* CME in the discipline prior to retaking the written examination.

Upon failure of the second recertification examination, the diplomate must provide documentation of 20 hours of current CME in the discipline prior to retaking the written examination.

Upon failure of the third recertification examination, the diplomate must provide documentation of 25 hours of current CME in the discipline prior to retaking the written examination.

Upon failure of the fourth recertification examination, the diplomate must provide documentation of 30 hours of current CME in the discipline prior to retaking the written examination.

\* Current CME hour's means continuing medical education accumulated since the most recent failure and prior to reexamination. Completion of additional and current continuing medical education does not guarantee passage of the written recertification examination.

Upon failure of the fifth recertification examination, the diplomate must provide documentation of 35 hours of current CME in the discipline prior to retaking the written examination.

Upon failure of the sixth recertification examination, and expiration of certification, the AOA will be notified, and the certification will cease. The diplomate may request, in writing, a remediation recommendation. The AOBS does not endorse any specific remedial plan, and completion of a remediation plan does not guarantee successful completion of the written recertification examination.

#### Component #4: Practice Performance

Each diplomate will be required to participate in practice performance. The goal of the practice performance component is to demonstrate performance improvement in surgical knowledge and surgical skills, including assessment activities of AOA specific core competencies. Each diplomate will be asked to demonstrate that they can assess the quality of surgical care they provide compared to peers and national benchmarks and then apply the best evidence or consensus recommendations to improve that surgical care using follow-up assessments. The practice performance component must be completed by the sixth (6<sup>th</sup>) year of the OCC process. This will allow the necessary time for the diplomate to demonstrate improvement if remediation is needed. The AOBS mechanism for practice performance must be at least one (1) of the following:

1. Chart Evaluation and Self-Evaluation
2. Hospital-Based or Surgery Center-Based Quality Improvement or Quality Assessment Program
3. Approved Web-Based Surgical Clinical Assessment Program

**Chart Evaluation:** The AOBS will develop a list of medical/surgical procedures most common to the specialties under the jurisdiction of the Board. Diplomates will be required to submit five case charts from the list and prepare the cases for review (specific instructions will be provided in advance). The cases will be reviewed using a practice performance questionnaire with percentages/grades associated with specific items. This questionnaire will also be used as the practice performance review (grading) sheet, as well as the diplomate's self-assessment tool (pre and post case evaluation).

**Practice performance remediation:** If a diplomate's case charts are reviewed and considered problematic as compared to national benchmarks and accepted standard of care, the diplomate will be required to resubmit five additional current case charts of the same type in order to demonstrate improvement. The AOBS also recommends that the diplomate conduct a 360 degree evaluation\* to assess the diplomates performance and behavior.

\*Definition of a 360 degree evaluation is an evaluation method that incorporates the use of surveys given to other healthcare providers, co-workers and patients in order to receive a full circle of confidential feedback. From this feedback, the diplomate should be able to set goals for self-development and improved individual performance. Under ideal circumstances, a 360 degree evaluation is used as an assessment tools for personal development rather than evaluation.

### **Hospital-Based or Surgery-Center Based Quality Improvement (Q.I.) or Quality Assessment (Q.A.)**

**Program:** The AOBS will accept verification that a diplomate has participated in a current (within a two year period prior to the OCC required practice performance requirement) Q.I. or Q.A. program, to include any and all findings, assessments, and deficiencies. Diplomates found to be deficient by their Q.I. or Q.A. program must provide documentation of appropriate remediation of the deficiency(s) (as recommended by their Q.I. or Q.A. committee).

**Approved Web-Based Surgical Clinical Assessment Program:** The AOBS will accept verification that a diplomate has participated in a current (within a two year period prior to the OCC required practice performance requirement) web-based surgical clinical assessment program (allopathic or osteopathic), to include any and all findings, assessments, and deficiencies. Diplomates found to be deficient by their Q.I. or Q.A. program must provide documentation of appropriate remediation of the deficiency(s) (as recommended the CAP program).

### **Component #5: Continuous AOA Membership**

Each diplomate will be required to maintain continuous and uninterrupted membership in the American Osteopathic Association (AOA). The AOBS will require that the diplomate provide proof of AOA membership at least once every three (3) years. The AOBS will conduct random verifications annually of 50% of the diplomates in the OCC process. If at the time of verification a diplomate has allowed their AOA membership to lapse, the AOA will be immediately notified that the diplomate is not in OCC compliance and will not be permitted to proceed in the OCC process without verification of reinstatement of AOA membership.

### **APPLICATION FOR OCC**

An official OCC application will be required from each diplomate at the beginning of each OCC process. The application process is in place to ensure that the AOBS has the most current contact information for the diplomate. The OCC application will be available on the AOBS website at [www.aobs.org](http://www.aobs.org).

All OCC application and documentation materials will remain on file with the AOBS. All materials supplied shall remain the property of the Board.

### **OCC FEES**

Each diplomate will be required to pay an annual OCC fee of \$200.00. Verification and compliance with the OCC process will be available through the Board Office upon written request from the diplomate.

## WRITTEN RECERTIFICATION EXAMINATION PROCESS

Each diplomate must submit to the AOBS a letter of intent to take the written recertification examination by March 1<sup>st</sup> for the Spring examination or by July 15<sup>th</sup> for the Fall examination, along with the examination fee of \$2,000.

On the day of the examination, the diplomate must register and show proper photo ID. The diplomate will receive an envelope containing an exam ID number, file update form and any other applicable information and instructions. The diplomate must place only this exam ID number on the examination score sheets and test booklet cover. The file update form is to be filled out and returned to the examination staff. The examination answer sheet(s) will be provided by the Board to a psychometric consultant for grading. On the day of the examination, NONE of the following items will be allowed in the examination area: cell phones, PDAs or other electronic devices, printed material relating to examination questions, hand bags, brief cases, backpacks or suit cases. The examination staff will not be responsible for storage. Violation of this requirement may result in termination of the examination.

In accordance with the AOA Bureau of Osteopathic Specialists Standards Review Committee, the written recertification examination is reviewed by a psychometrician who finds the examination process to be psychometrically sound and defensible and follows the rules of practice established in the APA/AERA National Standards for Education and Psychological Testing. Pass and fail decisions are based solely on the content mastery displayed by the diplomate.

## EXAMINATION GRADES

All examination records shall be submitted by the Chairman of the Examination Committee to the Board, and the entire Board shall determine the final grade of the written recertification examination.

The Board sets passing standards for the written recertification examination using an acceptable measurement model known as “criterion-referenced standard setting.” Using this model, the Board specifies the particular content and level of content difficulty necessary to be considered a passing diplomate. Board members, who are themselves all certified, come from both practice and academic settings. The standard represents the minimal knowledge specified to be considered a certified surgeon.

All examination results are reviewed and approved by the entire Board. Diplomates will be notified **no later than 60 days** following the Board’s decision. Diplomates failing the written recertification examination will subsequently receive a deficiency report.

## APPEAL MECHANISM

If the diplomate believes that the action of the Board constitutes unequal application of regulations and requirements or standards, unwarranted discrimination, prejudice, unfairness or improper conduct of all or any part of an examination conducted by the Board, the diplomate has the right to appeal to the Appeal Committee of the Board.

Appeal policy for recertification examinations in General Surgery, Cardiothoracic Surgery, Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, Neurological Surgery, Urological Surgery, General Vascular Surgery and Surgical Critical Care:

1. Scope of Appeal
  - a. Appealable Issues: Diplomates may appeal to the AOBS to raise concerns relative to the examination's administration (i.e., alleged bias/prejudice of a member of an examination team or failure to follow established examination procedures).
  - b. Non-Appealable Issues: The AOBS will not consider appeals based on examination content, sufficiency or accuracy of answers given to examination questions, scoring of the examination, scoring of answers to individual questions, and/or the determination of the minimum passing score.
  
2. Procedure for Appeal
  - a. Appeal Request Form: In order to appeal concerning the examination, a diplomate must set forth the basis for the appeal on an Appeal Request Form and submit the form to a member of the examination team. Appeal Request Forms will be provided to all certification diplomates prior to the commencement of the examination. Additional copies of the Appeal Request Form will be available upon request to the examination team. The appellant must submit the completed Appeal Request Form to the examination team within **two (2) hours** after the completion of the examination.
  - b. Late Appeals: All appeals submitted after the two-hour deadline for submission of the Appeal Request Form will be denied.
  - c. Evaluation of Appeal: Each appeal submitted on an Appeal Request Form within two hours of completion of the examination will be considered by the AOBS Appeal Committee. A majority vote of the Committee will determine whether the AOBS accepts or denies the appeal.
  - d. Notification of Diplomates: Diplomates will be advised by the AOBS of the Appeal Committee's decision by certified mail.

3. Effect of Decision
  - a. Decision to Accept Appeal
    - i. No scoring or recording of examination: If the Appeal Committee accepts an appeal, then the diplomate's examination will not be scored or recorded.
    - ii. Right to retake examination: A diplomate whose appeal is accepted shall have the right to a new examination at the next scheduled examination date at no additional application or examination fee. All other fees incurred are the responsibility of the diplomate. At that time, the examination will be conducted by a different examination team. The diplomate's original log may be utilized to retake the clinical examination. Retake examinations will be conducted in accordance with the format for the current examination.
    - iii. Failure to retake the examination: If for any reason the diplomate elects NOT to retake the examination at the next scheduled date, the appeal shall be considered null and void, and the diplomate will be required to reapply for the certification examination. The application shall be considered in accordance with the criteria in effect at the time of the new application. Exceptions (for good cause) to this stipulation will be considered on an individual basis by the Executive Committee.
    - iv. Further Appeals: (a) Current examination: The diplomate whose appeal is accepted shall NOT have the right to alter the original appeal of the current examination results, either within the AOBS or to the AOA, and (b) Subsequent examination: The diplomate whose appeal is accepted shall NOT have the right to appeal the next scheduled examination to the AOBS under this policy. However, the diplomate shall have the right to appeal to the AOA.
  - b. Decision to Deny Appeal: If an appeal is denied by the AOBS Appeals Committee, the diplomate shall have the right to appeal to the AOA.

Diplomates interested in appealing to the AOA should contact the American Osteopathic Association, Department of Education, Division of Certification, 142 East Ontario Street, Chicago, IL 60611.

### RECERTIFICATION CERTIFICATES

Certificates are issued by the Board to diplomates who have met all requirements of OCC for recertification and who have received the approval of the Bureau of Osteopathic Specialists. Each certificate shall be signed by the chairman and vice chairman of the Board. No certificate is valid until it has been signed by the executive director of the AOA.

## **Revocation and Reinstatement**

Immediately following official notification that a diplomate no longer meets any one of the OCC component requirements, the AOA will be notified and the certificate will be inactivated according to procedures developed by the Bureau and the AOA Department of Membership. The procedure will give the diplomate ample opportunity and notice to comply with any requirement deficiencies for maintaining AOA certification.

Reinstatement of a certificate which was inactivated when the diplomate was dropped from AOA membership for nonpayment of dues will be automatic upon reinstatement of the diplomate's AOA membership.

Reinstatement of a certificate which has been inactivated for any other reason than that stated above shall require compliance with the AOA or COA membership and annual dues requirement, as well as an affirmative vote of two-thirds (2/3) of the total membership of this Board and approval of the Bureau of Osteopathic Specialists.

## APPENDIX A

### **Americans with Disabilities Act and Special Testing Accommodations**

The American Osteopathic Board of Ophthalmology and Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery is committed to a policy of compliance with federal, state and local laws and regulations. The AOBS, in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Acts (ADA), has adopted the following policy. Physicians who are eligible for examination may submit an application for accommodation of a disability by using an application form approved by the Board.

#### ***Definition of Disability***

Under the ADA, a disability is defined as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of the individual. An individual is not substantially limited in a major life activity if the limitation does not amount to a significant restriction when compared with the abilities of the average person.

#### ***Policy Statement***

All qualified diplomates for board certification who suffer from a disability as defined in the ADA may apply to a certifying board for accommodation of that disability. The AOBS shall have the discretionary authority, subject to review by the BOS Appeals Committee and the AOA Board of Trustees, to determine if an accommodation is appropriate.

#### ***Procedure for Applying for Accommodation of Disability***

1. Requests for accommodation of a disability must be submitted in writing to the AOBS at least ninety (90) days prior to the examination date. The request must be supported by appropriate documentation of the diagnosis of disability and the need for accommodation, including the evaluation of the diplomate by a qualified professional (see documentation requirements below).
2. Requests for accommodation must be complete and submitted on time. The AOBS will not delay scheduled administrations of examinations due to a diplomate's failure to submit a complete application.
3. The AOBS must complete its review of requests for accommodation in a timely fashion and advise the diplomate within thirty (30) days of its receipt of a

request for accommodation: (a) the requested accommodation will be granted, (b) the requested accommodation will be granted in part; (c) additional information is required; or (d) the requested accommodation will be denied.

4. The AOBS may request additional information, including requiring an applicant to secure a second opinion from an outside expert or submitting the applicant's documentation to an outside expert. The cost of review by an outside expert will be paid by the AOBS.
5. In general, reapplication for special accommodation is not required for each examination administration. However, applicants seeking accommodation of a new disability or a different accommodation of the same disability must submit new applications.

#### ***Documentation Requirements***

Requirements for accommodation must be supported by appropriate documentation of the disability and the need for the requested accommodation. At a minimum, the application should provide the certifying board with the following information and documentation, which is to be prepared and furnished at the applicant's expense:

- **Identification of the disability**
- **Identification of the requested accommodation(s)** for each identified disability
- **The name and current contact information** (address, telephone number, email address) of each professional providing a report(s) in support of the disability and/or requested accommodation
- **A verification and authorization form** signed by the certification diplomate
- **An education and examination history**, including the following information: (a) the name, location and dates of attendance for all schools the diplomate attended from elementary school to the present, (b) identify the schools which provided accommodations for the disability in examination settings and the nature of accommodations made for the disability, (c) identify standardized tests completed in the course of the diplomates education (e.g., ACT, SAT, MCAT, COMLEX/NBOME); (d) for each test identified, diplomate to indicate whether he/she received an accommodation for the stated disability and identify

the nature of the accommodation; (e) if the diplomate sought an accommodation that has been denied, please explain the circumstances involved. If the diplomate has never received an accommodation, please provide a detailed explanation as part of the neuropsychological evaluation discussed below concerning the reasons no accommodation was given in the past and the reason one is needed now.

- **For diplomates seeking accommodation of a learning disability, a comprehensive neuropsychological evaluation report.** The report should be issued by a qualified professional (psychiatrist or licensed psychologist) who regularly practices neuropsychology. The report must be based upon examination of the applicant within the last five years. The report must be written on, or accompanied by a letter written on, the evaluating professional's letterhead. The requisite elements of a comprehensive evaluation are an intelligence test, an assessment of neuropsychological functions, an academic achievement test and psychiatric/psychological history. For diplomates seeking accommodations on the basis of attention deficit disorder or hyperactivity disorder, the evaluation must include a behavioral index. The requirements for the neuropsychosocial report are identified and described in greater detail in Appendix B.

### ***Evaluation of Accommodation Requests***

The AOBS will review requests for accommodation upon receipt of the information identified above. The review process will attempt to determine: (a) if a diplomate is disabled and the nature of a disability, (b) whether the disability interferes with the diplomate's ability to take the certifying examinations, (c) whether the requested accommodation is necessary to allow the diplomate to take the examinations, (d) whether a different accommodation would better serve the purpose of the certifying exam while still allowing the diplomate to take the examination.

Answers to these questions may not be clear from the documentation presented. Therefore, the certifying boards may request an opinion from an outside expert and either send the documentation submitted by the diplomate to the expert for review or ask the diplomate to be examined by an

outside expert. Cost of consultation with an outside expert will be paid by the AOBS.

Based on the review of all documentation, the AOBS may decide to: (a) grant a request for accommodation, (b) grant a request for accommodation that is different than the requested accommodation, (c) deny the request for accommodation. The AOBS will notify the diplomate in writing of its decision. If the AOBS decides not to grant a requested accommodation because a requested accommodation is a fundamental alteration or an undue burden, the Board shall notify the diplomate of any alternative methods of accommodation suggested by the expert which are acceptable to it or, if no such alternatives have been suggested, the AOBS shall inform the diplomate and invite the diplomate to suggest alternative accommodations.

### ***Appeals***

If a request for accommodation has not been granted, a diplomate may request that the Board reconsider its decision or appeal the Board's decision to the Appeal Committee of the Bureau of Osteopathic Specialists. Any appeal must be submitted to the secretary of the BOS president within sixty (60) days of the date of the AOBS written decision concerning the request for accommodation.

### ***Procedures for Examination Administration***

Where possible, examinations for disabled persons will be proctored and will be given on the same day as other examinations. The location of the examination administration will be determined by the Board on the basis of feasibility of providing necessary services and convenience to the diplomate. Where appropriate, to reduce the effect of the diplomate's disability on his or her performance on the examination, the following accommodations may be provided: (a) disabled persons may be tested separately, (b) disabled persons may be given assistance in reading or recording answers, (c) auxiliary aids and services can be offered, but only if they do not fundamentally alter the measurement of skills or knowledge the examination is intended to test and they would not result in an undue burden to the Board; and/or (d) time extensions may be granted to accommodate disabled diplomates. Other accommodations will be made upon

presentation of appropriate information and documentation supporting the requested documentation.

## APPENDIX B

### **Required Elements of the Neuropsychosocial Report**

1. Intelligence Tests. The Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale-Revised is mandatory. The report may include other estimates of verbal and nonverbal intelligence deemed appropriate by the professional preparing the report, such as Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, Raven's Progressive Matrices or Leiter International.
2. Assessment of Neuropsychological Functions, including: (a) a complete, integrated neuropsychological battery, such as the Halstead-Reitan Neuropsychological Battery or the Luria Nebraska Neuropsychological Battery; (b) memory assessments that utilize an age-normed, standardized instrument assessing both verbal and nonverbal memory such as the Wechsler Memory Scale-Revised; and (c) assessments of the specific cognitive and perceptual processes affected by the disability. Examples: in cases of auditory-verbal learning disabilities, include specific tests of phonemic processing. In cases of attention deficit disorder, include specific tests of sustained attentional resources, such as the Continuous Performance Test.
3. Academic Achievement Test Results. Standardized, comprehensive academic achievement test,

appropriately normed for the diplomate's age group, including assessment of spelling, arithmetic and reading comprehension.

4. Psychological/Psychiatric History, including (a) standardized psychometric assessment of personality and emotional functioning (MMPI-2 or MCMI-II); (b) standard diagnostic interview for presence of current psychiatric disorders; and (c) if the diplomate has undergone treatment for a psychological or psychiatric condition within the past three years, provide a report, including diagnosis, from the treating mental health professional.
5. Behavioral Indices (**required only for diplomates seeking accommodations on the basis of attention deficit disorder or hyperactivity disorder**) using standardized psychometric assessments of behavioral indices of attention deficit disorder, such as the Wender Scales or the Achenbach Scale.

The professional's report should address all appropriate elements relevant to the request for accommodation of disability. With respect to each element, the report should include the name of each test administered, its date, a description of the diplomate's performance in each of the areas of the test battery, a summary of test scores, and a complete diagnostic formulation in standard DSM-IV terminology utilizing all diagnostic axes. Diagnostic formulations should integrate current testing findings with academic and psychiatric histories. Raw test data should be available upon request.