First diplomates board certified in the subspecialty of clinical informatics

The newly certified diplomates in the subspecialty of clinical informatics received notice of their board certification in December 2013, a development that will contribute to the major systemic overhaul that is underway in healthcare delivery. As leaders in the field, these subspecialists are expected to apply innovative informatics solutions within health systems and encourage interdisciplinary collaboration to improve the value of care delivered.

The American Medical Informatics Association (AMIA) has led development of the new clinical informatics subspecialty, working for more than 5 years to define and help create the discipline with the goal of advancing the field and the role of informaticians in improving healthcare. The creation of the new subspecialty will help standardize clinical informatics training programs, increase the number of training opportunities available, and provide an immediately recognized credential for organizations hiring informaticians.

The newly certified leaders of the clinical informatics field represent a milestone in informatics profession and its role in healthcare delivery. These physicians have demonstrated that they understand the design and implementation of informatics systems, and are poised to integrate these solutions into their healthcare delivery organizations.

The board exam was administered in October through the American Board of Preventive Medicine (ABPM), and offered to pathologists through the American Board of Pathology (ABP). The subspecialty was approved by the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) in 2011. The 456 new subspecialists include a substantial number of AMIA members, something that might be expected, but is still a strong testament to the value AMIA has brought to the profession, provided for members, and commits to the field of clinical informatics.

In support of the subspecialty, AMIA launched the Clinical Informatics Board review courses in 2013, hosting four face to face courses and introducing an online course and practice exam through learn.amia.org. Internal data show a majority of the new diplomates participated one of the AMIA courses.

William Hersh, MD, FACEP, FACMI, Professor and Chair of the Department of Medical Informatics & Clinical Epidemiology (DMICE) at Oregon Health & Science University served as the AMIA Course Director. Faculty for the course included Bimal Desai, MD, MBA, FAAP; Dianne Montella, MD; Thomas Payne, MD, FACEP, FACMI; and the support of Ben S Munger, PhD as the certification consultant. On behalf of AMIA members and as Chairman of the Board, all deserve our thanks and gratitude.

Clinical informatics has arrived. No doubt, clinical informatics has come of age, but we recognize that we are still pioneers in this field. There is tremendous work to do to meet our goal and expectation of transforming healthcare. In the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education’s (ACGME) definition of the informatics discipline, the operative word is ‘transform’. Every day, informaticians are working in their healthcare settings to change how we do things, to improve patient care and population health.

The board certification is open to physicians of all specialties, encouraging interdisciplinary cooperation in the clinical informatics field. Physicians can currently become eligible for the exam by demonstrating practical informatics experience. However, after 5 years, candidates for the subspecialty will need to complete an accredited clinical informatics fellowship with the Council on Graduate Medical Education (COGME).

What makes this subspecialty appealing is that any primary specialty diplomate can apply to become board certified in clinical informatics. It is illustrative of the ubiquitous need across our entire healthcare delivery system to engage with professionals who understand how to improve the value of care with informatics.

Experts in the field point to the subspecialty as a critical avenue to optimizing care, reducing errors, and rooting practice in evidence. These issues were explored by leaders in the clinical informatics field during the recently launched iHealth 2014 conference on clinical informatics in Orlando, Florida.

The complete list of new clinical informatics subspecialists as reported through ABPM and ABP is now part of the JAMIA record (see the online supplementary data section). For more information about the board certification, please visit the ABPM website (ABPM.org). The application process for the 2014 exam opens on March 1.

ADVANCED INTERPROFESSIONAL INFORMATICS CERTIFICATION TASK FORCE WORK CONTINUES

Despite this advance for the clinical informatics subspecialty, the transformation of healthcare does not rest on the shoulders of physicians alone. It is a multidisciplinary challenge and AMIA continues its work to create and expand the availability of certification to the full range of professionals in allied health fields. The AMIA Board of Directors working with the Academic Forum and other informatics leaders, continues to develop plans in the alternate pathway for certification of clinical and public health informatics professionals.

From the beginning, AMIA recognized this critical need for clinical informatics professionals (nurses, dentists, pharmacists, computer scientists, etc.) as well as non-US physicians and US physicians who are not ABMS certified, to have an equivalent pathway to clinical informatics certification. AMIA will continue to update its members and the community with developments as they become available.

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