



spotlight on health

Choosing a Doctor: Board Certification Important But Misunderstood

(NAPSA)—When it comes to choosing a doctor, consumers say bedside manner, communication skills and board certification matter most. Those are the findings of a new survey released by the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS), a not-for-profit organization that oversees the board certification process of physicians in the United States. According to the survey, more than nine out of 10 Americans consider communication skills and board certification more important than a doctor's hospital affiliation, place of training or office location, with 95 percent of respondents naming communications skills and bedside manner as the most important physician traits, and 93 percent naming board certification.

Although the survey results indicated that the vast majority of Americans think board certification is important, the survey also found that most people don't understand what board certification is. That's an important distinction, says ABMS president and CEO Kevin B. Weiss, MD.

"Sixty percent of those surveyed incorrectly believe that a doctor has to be board certified to practice medicine, and only 45 percent had ever checked to see if their doctor is board certified," said Dr. Weiss. "Board certification is actually a voluntary process that goes above and



beyond what is required by law for a doctor to practice medicine. That means patients can be sure that any doctor who is board certified by an ABMS Member Board is committed to lifelong learning and the highest standards of care in his or her medical specialty."

According to Dr. Weiss, one reason for the information gap may be the difficulty patients have in accessing information about their physicians. More than half said it is difficult to find useful, clear information on doctors.

The survey also found that:

- Half of those surveyed did not ask questions or research the qualifications of a specialist when referred by their primary care physicians.

- While four out of 10 have researched a doctor online using a variety of Web sites, only one in four have checked to see if a doctor has ever been sued for mal-

practice or been disciplined by a regulatory board.

ABMS oversees 24 Member Boards that certify physicians in more than 145 specialties and subspecialties. The preeminent medical organization serves as a resource for consumers seeking information on physician qualifications. Certification by a Member Board is widely recognized in health care as the gold standard for judging a physician's knowledge, experience and skills within a medical specialty.

Physicians who maintain their board certification participate in a program called ABMS Maintenance of Certification™ (MOC), which evaluates a physician's skills and knowledge on an ongoing basis—rather than once every several years—and includes communication skills as part of the evaluation.

"Communication skills are increasingly recognized as something necessary to quality health care," said Dr. Weiss. "These survey findings confirm that patients want their doctors to talk with them and provide clear information they can understand, as well as treat them with the best medicines and procedures."

To determine whether a physician is board certified by an ABMS Member Board, visit www.abms.org or call toll-free (866) ASK-ABMS.