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Clinical informatics becomes a board-certified medical subspecialty

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WASHINGTON – The American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) has now recognized clinical informatics as a subspecialty, according to the American Medical Informatics Association (AMIA).

AMIA officials announced the news Thursday following what they called "a multi-year initiative" to elevate clinical informatics to an ABMS subspecialty.

According to AMIA, the certification will be available to physicians who have primary specialty certification through ABMS.

[See also: **Clinical informatics officers, IT specialists wanted**.]

Clinical informatics (CI) certification will be based on "a rigorous set of core competencies," developed by AMIA and its members. AMIA said many of its members have pioneered the field and supported CI's new status as an ABMS-recognized area of clinical expertise.

AMIA anticipates the first CI board exam to be available next fall, with the first certificates awarded early in 2013. To prepare physicians who wish to sit for this examination, AMIA is developing preparatory materials both as online and in-person courses starting in spring 2012.

"It is entirely appropriate and timely to certify clinical informatics as a specialized area of training and expertise in an era when more and more clinicians are turning to data-driven, computer-assisted clinical decision support to provide care for their patients," said AMIA's Board of Directors Chair Nancy M. Lorenzi, of Vanderbilt University Medical Center. "Clinical informatics blends medical and informatics knowledge to support and optimize healthcare delivery."

AMIA officials said they noticed as early as 2005 that demand for formal training and certification in clinical informatics (CI) was growing among physicians. Two years later, with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, AMIA launched a process to define the core content of the CI specialty and the training requirements for proposed CI fellowships that would be accredited by the Accreditation Council of Graduate Medical Education.

[See also: **CMIOs see roles changing**.]

In 2009, the American Board of Preventive Medicine (ABPM) agreed to sponsor an application for a CI specialty examination, and a year later submitted a formal application to the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) to consider the creation of a new specialty certification. Once submitted, the ABPM

proposal attracted support from the American Board of Pathology, which will cosponsor the subspecialty with the ABPM. Subsequently, several other medical boards expressed interest in joining as formal co-sponsors.

According to AMIA, the role of the clinical informatician is to use his/her knowledge of patient care in combination with an understanding of informatics concepts, methods, and tools to:

- assess information and knowledge-based needs of healthcare professionals and patients;
- characterize, evaluate, and refine clinical processes;
- develop, implement, and refine clinical decision support systems, and
- lead or participate in the procurement, customization, development, implementation, management, evaluation, and continuous improvement of clinical information systems, such as electronic health records and order-entry systems.

"Establishment of the clinical informatics medical subspecialty is consistent with the current emphasis on broadening and professionalizing the health information technology workforce," said AMIA President and CEO Edward H. Shortliffe, MD. "With the need over the next decade for 50,000 informatics professionals in the health sector with various levels of expertise, this focus on physician expertise in clinical informatics is clearly a step in the right direction."

"The CI exam will encourage more medical schools to build informatics into their training programs and to begin addressing real-world information management needs of physicians in virtually every work environment," said Shortliffe.

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