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Author
Kazzi, A Antoine

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Dear Colleagues and Friends,

I choose to begin this President’s Message with words that stuck with me for over two decades. I wish to resurface them here for their relevance to what I predict will be judged in the future as one of the most turbulent times in the history of our specialty. The Florida Board Certification conflict is and will always be remembered one that defined the future of Emergency Medicine as a primary specialty, answering the core question: Will EM ever succeed in commanding the respect of other disciplines in the house of medicine?

Emergency Medicine is currently at one of its most critical junctions - facing the most serious challenge to its existence since it was first recognized by the House of Medicine (the AMA, the AOA, the ABMS, and the ACGME) as a separate primary discipline with its own body of knowledge, curriculum, accredited training and certification process.

In my last President Message, I alerted you to what happened in Florida under the radar screens of all EM leaders who are genuine in their commitment to EM residency training and board certification. In this Common Sense issue (CS), the Chair of the AAEM Florida Board Certification Taskforce Mark Foppe, DO, FAAEM, FACOEP, and AAEM Board member Howard Blumstein, MD, FAAEM (as our new CS Editor) discuss this matter and its implications. I apologize for repeating some of what was stated in the last issue or in their articles and have sectioned my message into a number of segments that address different angles of the matter.

1) Overview of what happened in Florida:

In 2002, the Florida Board of Medicine (FBM) voted to allow AAPS as a third certifying body in the state of Florida (ABMS and AOA being the other two). This gave the holders of its BCEM certificates ground to advertise themselves as Emergency Physicians with comparable qualifications to ABEM and AOBEM graduates. The Florida Osteopathic Board of Medicine did the same.

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This was all based on flawed 2001 testimony and a travesty hearing where EM stakeholders were not invited and major differences between AAPS and ABEM/ABOEM were omitted (such as the absence of a requirement for specialty-specific EM residency training in BCEM). EM was misrepresented and appalling conflicts of interests (among witnesses who were FBM board members) were omitted or disregarded in the process. AAPS lined up 14 witnesses (out of 19) who interestingly were nearly all BCEM-certificate holders of AAPS—indicating that the AAPS move in Florida was staged primarily by BCEM certificate holders. Only four witnesses clearly opposed the AAPS petition to the FBM. They represented Dermatology, ENT and Plastics. The only EM specialty organization who knew about any of this sent one representative who provided testimony that was sympathetic to the AAPS claim. AAEM, ACOEP, SAEM, AACEM, CORD, EMRA, and the ACEP Councilors and membership were not notified of any of these developments and this stayed under their radar screens until it was uncovered and forwarded by AAEM to the rest of EM community.

In 2003-2004, AAPS (BCEM) found powerful legislators to sponsor a bill that would have provided their certificate holders equal status with ABMS. Such a status would have given BCEM and AAPS legal ground to sue in any context where they perceived discrimination against their certificate holders. No one opposed this bill. The Florida Medical Association attempted to secure the input of specialty societies to determine if it should or should not oppose it. No one responded. No one worked with the FMA to oppose it. So, the FMA dropped their opposition. It passed the house (110-0!) and almost passed the senate was it not for a glitch that delayed it in one committee. It is expected to come back this year. AAEM, EMRA, ACOEP, CORD, AACEM, SAEM and the ACEP Council & members did not know about this until May 2004 when AAEM uncovered it and brought it up to all of the other EM organizations.

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Written testimony was prepared and distributed to the FMA Council on Legislation and included position statements from AAEM, AAEM/RES, ACEP, and CORD. However, these written testimonials do not reflect the most important part of what happened at the FMA Council on Legislation: the verbal testimony and representation was indeed what enabled us to secure a first victory for the specialty of EM. Present were: Drs. Mark Foppe (AAEM TF Chair & member, ACOEP TF), Mylissa Graber (EMRA Past President), Antoine Kazzi (AAEM President), Comilla Sasson (EMRA President-Elect), Kenneth Scheppke (Fl-AAEM VP), Sandra Schwemmer (Chair, ACOEP TF), David Siegel (ACEP/FCEP), Joel Stern (Fl-AAEM President) and one staff member of Fl-ACEP.

EM testimonials began mid-morning with FCEP Director of Governmental Affairs Dr. David Siegel who introduced ACEP and FCEP as the largest and oldest EM organization and as the specialty society recognized by the FMA. He stated “FCEP and ACEP believe the current standards for BCEM, which do not include residency training in emergency medicine for all tracks, make the BCEM standards different than those of ABEM and AOBEM.” Dr. Siegel concluded with “FCEP and ACEP would respectfully request that the Council of Legislation recommend to the FMA Board of Governors that the FMA oppose any attempt to codify recognition of the BCEM component of AAPS for Board certification in emergency medicine in Florida Statute.”

This was then met with some concern from the Council which emphasized that it would be best to have this AAPS bill fought by all specialty societies united – rather than to see this fragmented into individual effort by an unspecified number of specialty societies who wish to address specific issues of individual importance to them within the bill.

Then the Council gave floor time to FMA members. Fl-AAEM President Dr. Joel Stern who introduced AAEM, Fl-AAEM, and its Vice President Dr. Kenneth Scheppke. Dr. Stern asked the Council to take note of the written testimonials we had just handed directly to them. Dr. Scheppke then read the AAEM testimony:

--- AAEM and FLAAEM believe allowing BCEM physicians to claim certification in EM that is equal in status and value to ABEM or AOBEM after acquiring variable unsupervised exposure critically undermines the value of EM residency training.

--- AAEM and FLAAEM believe allowing BCEM physicians to claim board certification in EM equal to the one administered by the ABMS or AOA critically undermines the whole process of specialty training and the entire graduate medical education system.

--- AAEM and FLAAEM recognize the Florida Medical Association’s commitment to protect the patients of Florida by helping to ensure that only those physicians who are properly credentialed and performing within their scope of practice treat Florida’s patients.
3) What about the Florida Board of Medicine?

AAEM and AAEM/RES sent letters to the FBM and expressed their strong opposition to the FBM 2002 ruling and their concern with regard to the process and content of the testimony provided to the FBM. We expressed our intent to challenge this vote and to petition the FBM and FOBM to secure an internal review of what we consider a true travesty. AAEM continues to investigate the detail of what happened in 2001 and 2002, including all public records of the FBM and FOBM and hundreds of pages of testimonials and transcripts of the proceedings. AAEM also contacted the FSMB expressing concern and exploring mechanisms to challenge or review the flawed FBM process. Rest assured that AAEM will use all means - internal and external - to revoke this 2002 FBM ruling and to make sure that anyone who participated in orchestrating this 2001-2002 travesty is held fully accountable for the evidence, facts and conflicts of interest that were omitted or mischaracterized.

The AAEM Board yesterday voted unanimously to commit all necessary and available financial resources to ensure that this battle is fought to the end.

4) What we need of you? How can you help?

The battle has begun and we need everyone’s help. At stake is the value of our EM specialty board certification and of EM residency training. At stake is all what we believe in with regard to the value of EM, board certification, and to which we have dedicated life and resources.

Join your State chapter. The importance of this membership was never more evident than in Florida where we were late in uncovering the travesty because we were too small and because AAEM has limited human and financial resources at the state levels.

AAEM and AAEM have begun to recruit our own lobbyist in Florida. If you are a Florida AAEM member, join the FMA. Let us know you did.

-- Donate funds into PAC at www.aaem.org
-- Donate tax-deductible funds into our AAEM Legal Fund. www.aaem.org
- These funds will be used without any doubt for what will be a difficult and expensive battle.

--- There will be no other time to defend your specialty and the value of your training!

We truly cannot do this without you!