Can anyone extend their certificate by three years?

Any Diplomate who has started Maintenance of Certification for Family Physicians (MC-FP) – that is any Diplomate who has certified or recertified since 2003 - may opt to extend their certification. Those Diplomates who have not yet entered MC-FP will do so after they next recertify. At that time, they may also chose the option to extend the certificate that they receive at that time. Anyone choosing to extend their certificate will have to successfully complete a combination of modules and meet the required deadlines for this process. The process has been sectioned into three-year Stages with specific requirements that must be successfully completed by the end of each three-year Stage. The requirements for each Stage are the completion of two Part II modules (currently the only available Part II modules are the Self-Assessment Modules) and one Part IV module (currently the only available Part IV modules are the Performance in Practice Modules and the METRIC modules produced by the AAFP).

a. What comprises a Self-Assessment Module (SAM)?

A Self-Assessment Module (SAM) is comprised of the 60-question Knowledge Assessment followed by a Clinical Simulation. The SAMs are the modules which are required to successfully complete Part II of Maintenance of Certification for Family Physicians (MC-FP). There will be six different health topics to choose from in 2006, with more added every year.

b. What comprises a Performance in Practice Module (PPM)?

A Performance in Practice Module (PPM) is comprised of a Quality Improvement activity which takes course over a three to six-month period. The PPMs are the modules which are required to successfully complete Part IV of Maintenance of Certification for Family Physicians (MC-FP). There will be four different health topics to choose from in 2006, with more added every year.

c. Are there any other module options?

We have established a process by which outside providers can submit Part II or Part IV modules to us for approval. Currently, only one such Part IV module has been approved and that is the METRIC module as provided by the American Academy of Family
How do I know which modules I need to take?

If you are currently in MC-FP and have chosen the option which will extend your current certificate by three years (essentially creating a ten year certificate period from when you last recertified), the requirements are two Part II modules and one Part IV module for a total of three modules for each three-year Stage. You may complete these modules at your own pace, doing all in one year or one every year, but they all must be completed by the end of each three-year Stage. A total of three Stages, or nine modules, must be completed during the ten year MC-FP cycle.

If you do not wish to choose the three-year extension option, you will stay in the current seven-year MC-FP cycle and will need to complete six Part II modules and one Part IV module. If you do choose the three-year extension option and fail to complete the requirements noted above for any Stage, you will fall back into the original seven-year MC-FP cycle.

If you are currently participating in the MC-FP program, you may login to your Physician Portfolio and check the Track Your Progress page. This area keeps you informed as to what modules you have successfully completed and what you still need to complete to fulfill the requirements for each Stage of MC-FP. For example, you may have completed two SAMs and now need to complete one PPM which will be indicated in the Track Your Progress panels. Remember that until the new MC-FP options are fully implemented in January 2007, your progress in your Physician Portfolio will be based upon the current seven-year MC-FP cycle.

How do I tell one module from another?

The SAMs are found under the Self-Assessment Module section of the ABFM website, and the PPMs are found in the Performance in Practice Module section. The choices of health topics for each type of module can be found within each respective area. You can learn more about the METRIC modules at the AAFP website.

I am not a practicing physician, do I still need to participate?

Yes, physicians who are administrators or who practice in settings which do not allow them to complete a PPM or METRIC module (e.g., urgent care or
locum tenens) will still be required to participate in MC-FP. These Diplomates will elect to complete a different type of Part IV activity. These options include a Methods in Medicine Module (MIMM) or the Patient Safety Module (PSM). The first MIMM will be on information management and will be available in 2007. The PSM will come online in 2008. ABFM will be adding more MIMM options in the future which will accommodate these Diplomates.

Can I modify my certification term if I’ve already begun taking modules?

If you have already begun the Maintenance of Certification process, you can count those modules already taken for MC-FP credit toward your certificate extension.

Are the requirements the same for everyone?

In sum, the requirements are the same, however your pathway to obtaining a three-year extension will vary somewhat, in terms of the combination of different types of modules, depending on whether or not you see patients in a clinical setting that will allow you to complete a PPM.

If I just want to retain or qualify for a 7-year certificate, does that mean I can dispense with taking any modules?

No. Participation in MC-FP is still a requirement for eligibility to sit for the recertification examination. That is not an element of the program that has changed. You will still need to complete six Part II modules (currently the SAMs) and one Part IV module (currently the PPMs or METRIC) prior to your next exam.

If I am behind in completing my modules, can I catch up?

You may catch up within each three-year stage. That is, while three modules are required for every three-year Stage, they may be completed at any time during that three-year Stage. However, falling behind in either the first or second Stage will automatically disqualify the Diplomate from being granted the three-year extension necessary for a 10-year certificate.
May we go to outside providers for modules?

ABFM currently offers one alternative option for a Part IV module as developed by an external provider. This Part IV module option is the METRIC module as provided by the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP). The ABFM is working to approve more modules from other external providers and hopes to be able to offer these in the near future.

How many modules from external providers can we use in a 10-year cycle?

Only two external provider modules, of any kind, will be allowed as an alternative within the 7 or 10-year cycle for a Part II module requirement. Only one external provider module of any kind will be allowed as an alternative within the 7 or 10-year cycle for Part IV requirements.

Does this replace CMEs and if so, how many does it replace?

The requirement of 300 CME credits in the six years immediately prior to the exam remains. However, CME credit is awarded for completion of each of the modules which are currently available through the ABFM website and the AAFP’s METRIC module.

Can I take CMEs instead of participating in modules to satisfy the requirement?

No, you must complete the required number of Part II and Part IV modules for either the seven-year or ten-year MC-FP option, depending on which you choose. Participation in MC-FP is a requirement for eligibility to sit for the recertification examination.

Wouldn’t you be requiring us to take modules every year after our 7-year certificate anyway – how is this different?

Yes. Periodic modules are still part of the requirements for obtaining a 7-year certificate. However, by providing Diplomates with an option to complete a particular course of maintenance of certification which will lead to a 10-year certificate, the recertification examination is taken every ten years instead of every seven.
I obtained my 7-year certificate in 2003 but have not participated in any modules. Can I still extend my certificate?

Yes, but you must hurry and complete all the requirements of the first three-year Stage by the end of 2006 to remain eligible for the three-year certificate extension. As an inaugural MC-FP participant, you may choose to complete either three SAMs or two SAMs and one PPM for your first three-year Stage to attain initial eligibility for certificate extension. This would be followed by two Part II modules and a Part IV module by 2009 and 2 more Part II modules and a Part IV module by 2013. You would then sit for your next examination in 2013.

I obtained my first certificate in 2004 – how do I extend my certificate to 2014 instead of 2011?

You can extend your certificate if, by 2007 you complete either 3 SAMs or 2 SAMs and a PPM, followed by 2 SAMs and a PPM by 2010 and 2 more SAMs and a PPM by 2014. You would then sit for your next certification in 2014.

How do I track my progress through the maintenance process?

The ABFM has a Web Portal that allows you to register and complete all MC-FP components as well as to access your own individual portfolio. The portfolio is a personal database that contains a physician’s contact information and tracks their progress through the MC-FP cycle.

How do I access the portal?

The portal can be accessed through the ABFM Website at www.theabfm.org and once there you will be able to set up your password-protected functions. Each physician has been assigned an ID and password for this purpose.

What if I cannot locate my ID and Password?

You may contact the ABFM Help Desk at 877-223-7437 or email them at help@theabfm.org to request your ID and password.
Is it possible to sit for the certification exam early?

Yes, a Diplomate may sit for a Year 7 or Year 10 certificate early, however, all of the MC-FP requirements will have to have been completed as if they were taking the exam in Year 7 or Year 10. In other words, one cannot participate in fewer modules than is required by taking the exam early.

Does my participation in MC-FP change my requirements with my state licensing board?

Each state has differing requirements. You should refer to your State Licensing authority for information regarding your specific license requirements.

Did ABFM take this step because of all the criticism of the MC-FP process?

No, although through our research, we found many Diplomates receptive to the possibility of a 10-year certificate.

What future changes are being contemplated to the program?

The ABFM is working to develop new modules for Part IV, particularly to address the needs of those physicians who do not practice or who do not have a clinical patient population that will allow them to take a PPM. We also hope to approve more modules from outside providers.

Can I choose any module to satisfy the requirements needed for the 10-year certificate?

The requirements for each three-year Stage are: two Part II modules and one Part IV module (for those who recertified in 2003 or 2004 only, please see above for the special exception for your first Stage).

Is it a requirement that one undertake the modules on the Internet?

Yes, the module activities are only available as interactive web applications.
Does it take longer to complete the modules if I only have a dial-up connection?

Yes, as most dial-up users already know, any interactive web application functions more slowly with a dial-up than with a broadband connection.

How many modules can I undertake in a year?

As many as one wishes, as further modules may count for CME credit. Within each Stage, any modules taken in excess of the requirements cannot be counted toward MC-FP credit in a subsequent stage. Furthermore, these modules cannot be retaken in a later Stage for MC-FP credit unless a new, updated version of the same module has been created. For example, a Diplomate takes a Diabetes SAM for CME credit during a Stage when three modules have already been completed for MC-FP credit. During a later three-year Stage, the Diplomate tries to complete the Diabetes SAM again, this time for MC-FP credit. This will not be acceptable for MC-FP credit unless the Diabetes SAM has been updated with a new version. It is expected that each SAM will be updated annually.

Is the cost for the modules included in my payment for my certificate or does it cost me extra every year?

The options for payment are as follows:

**Plan I -- Full Prepayment:** In this plan, the Diplomate pays a single, one-time fee upfront at the beginning of the MC-FP cycle. This plan guarantees the total cost of MC-FP participation, including the examination, over either a seven or ten year cycle. The full prepayment plan allows complete and unrestricted access to all Part II and Part IV modules developed by the ABFM; you may complete as many modules as you like without additional charges.

**Plan II -- Annual Payments:** In this plan, the Diplomate pays an annual fee in the first six years of the MC-FP cycle. This annual fee is established at a fixed amount in the first year of MC-FP participation and guarantees the total cost of MC-FP participation, including the examination, over either a seven or ten year cycle. The annual fee for participation will not change once this plan is selected.

**Plan III -- Pay-as-you-go balloon financing:** In this plan, the Diplomate pays an annual fee for participation in MC-FP with a balloon payment due in the year the examination is taken. The annual fee for participation will not
change once this plan is selected. The balloon payment due is not guaranteed and may be influenced by factors such as inflation and the cost of producing the elements of MC-FP. This payment will be determined in the year of the examination.

What happens if I miss one of my annual payments?

If a Diplomate selects the annual payment plan, they must make annual payments in each of the first six years, regardless of the completion of modules. If an annual payment is missed, the Diplomate will be automatically moved to the pay-as-you-go balloon financing plan. The pay-as-you-go fee to be incurred will be the one in effect for new entrants to MC-FP in the year that the transfer is made to this plan from the annual payment plan. The Diplomate will be given credit for the “unused” portion of their annual payments toward the new payment plan.

What happens if I select the pay-as-you-go balloon financing plan and do not take a module in a particular year and therefore do not make any payments that year?

In order to be eligible for the extension of the seven-year certificate to ten years, progress must be made in each three-year Stage. Therefore those Diplomates wishing to obtain the extension will be able to catch up on their payments every three years. If progress is made toward an extension, the fee that is paid for each year’s participation will remain fixed at the initial amount paid. If the Diplomate does not qualify for an extension, the pay-as-you-go fee will not be guaranteed when they next return to take a module. Prior to taking the examination all modules required for the seven year certificate will need to be caught up and the fee for these modules will be based upon the then current pay-as-you-go fee.

Does it cost me more money to obtain a 10-year certificate?

No, and in fact, the new payment plan to be implemented in January 2007 will result in a lower annual cost to those Diplomates choosing the full prepayment option or the annual payment option over the ten-year MC-FP cycle. Both of these payment options guarantee the total cost of MC-FP, including the examination.

Are refunds available if I select Plan 1 or Plan 2 of the MC-FP payment plans and then do not wish to participate?

Yes, refunds will be given in the following situations:
• Withdrawal from active practice—This will usually be the result of an event such as retirement, disability, or death. If the physician has chosen a prepayment option, the ABFM will, upon written request, refund the unused portion of any prepaid fee less an administrative fee.

• Loss of certification because of license problems—If a physician loses certification because of a license problem and has chosen a prepayment option, the ABFM will, upon written request, refund the unused portion of any prepaid MC-FP fee, less an administrative fee. At such time as the medical license is reinstated, certification will also be reinstated to any Diplomate whose certificate has not expired, and the physician may continue to participate in MC-FP on a pay-as-you-go basis. However, it is important to note that those physicians who encounter license problems may wish not to receive a refund and continue to complete MC-FP requirements, despite the fact that their certificates have been revoked. This will allow them to remain current with their MC-FP requirements when their certificate is re-instated after their license problems have been resolved.

What portion of the prepaid MC-FP fee will be refunded?

The ABFM will, upon written request, refund the amount paid which is over and above the pay-as-you-go balloon financing fee for the modules which have been started, and an administrative fee will be charged for making the change.

When do I need to make the selection of my MC-FP payment plan?
You will be able to select the full prepayment option at any time. Note however that as this plan offers a discount for prepayment, it is expected to increase every six months. You will only be able to select the annual payment plan in your first year of eligibility for participation in MC-FP. The pay-as-you-go balloon financing plan is available at any time. This payment plan amount is also expected to increase over time. As it is expected that the amounts due under all three of the payment plans will increase annually, the only way to guarantee the lowest total amount paid is to select a payment plan early and make all necessary payments under the plan chosen on a timely basis.
If I select the annual payment or pay-as-you-go balloon financing plan and want to take more than one module per year can I do so by making more of the regularly scheduled payments?

Yes, you will be allowed to prepay an annual payment or pay-as-you-go amount at the time you take any module and thereby keep your payments associated with MC-FP progress.

Once I select an MC-FP payment plan are the amounts fixed?

Yes, with the exception of the balloon payment due in the year the examination is taken, once you select any of the payment options they will not change over the seven or ten year cycle of your certificate as long as you adhere to the selected payment schedule. Please note that it is expected that all of the payment plans will increase over time so the earlier a plan is selected the lower the payments will be over the life of your certificate.

I see where the full prepayment option allows for unlimited access to Part II and Part IV components of MC-FP. IS this the only plan that provides this unlimited access?

Yes, only those selecting the full prepayment option will be granted full and unlimited access to all Part II and Part IV components of MC-FP developed by the ABFM.

Are MC-FP payment plan changes allowed?

Yes, Should an MC-FP participant wish to move from the pay-as-you-go balloon financing plan to the annual payments option they may do so in their first year of MC-FP eligibility by paying the difference at the time of the change and then paying the appropriate annual payment for the next five years. A physician may move to the full pre-payment mode at any time by paying the difference between all prior payments and the current single one-time fee at that time.

Will the prepaid portion of my fee be shown in my Portfolio?

Yes, If a prepayment plan for MC-FP has been chosen, the pay-as-you-go fee for each component will be deducted from the total payment(s) as each component is begun, and the remainder carried forward toward the cost of the examination at the end of the seven or ten-year cycle.
If the modules are given online, why does the ABFM charge so much to complete them?

The resources invested in the technological development and maintenance of these web applications are considerable and actually exceed the fee required to take the modules. Taking into account that successful completion of the modules confers CME credit as well, the modules are actually a good value in comparison to other CME fee/credit ratios.