



Stories from the American Board of Family Medicine

How ABFM and AAFP Are Working Together to “Lead The Change”

Health equity, the idea that every person should have the same opportunity to attain their full health potential, has become increasingly recognized in recent years as a significant and unrealized goal. Developments as varied as Black Lives Matter, increased focus on the rights of LGBTQ individuals, and the COVID-19 pandemic have all shone a light on the care gaps which exist in health care. Now more than ever, actions are being taken to better understand those deficiencies and educate physicians and the systems in which they work about how these disparities can be addressed more effectively in their practices, hospitals, and communities.

To meet the increased focus on eliminating health inequities, the American Board of Family Medicine (ABFM) was excited to work with the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) on a free self-assessment and learning activity entitled **Health Equity: Leading The Change**.

This new learning series explores some of the key components of health equity in five distinct modules: Striving for Health Equity, Addressing Social Determinants of Health, Supporting Vulnerable Populations, Championing Economics and Policy to Reduce Health Disparities, and Understanding the Impact of Climate Change on Population Health.

The series starts by examining health disparity at the individual level, and the focus expands with each module as they explore new dimensions of the topic. For each module completed, physicians will earn 2.5 points toward their ABFM self-assessment requirement and 1-2 CME credits while gaining a greater understanding of their role in reducing health inequities.

“In the summer of 2020, after George Floyd’s murder, ABFM heard from family physicians around the country. They were saying, ‘I want to do more, and I don’t know what to do,’” said Dr. Libby Baxley, ABFM Executive Vice President. “Diplomates understood there was a problem, but they weren’t sure how to approach this in their own practices. Those conversations prompted ABFM to consider what content would best guide doctors into the health equity conversation.”

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Dr. Erin Westfall

ABFM was able to quickly develop a Health Equity Performance Improvement (PI) activity to help guide practice changes to focus on recognizing social determinants of health, implicit bias within the practice, or disparate patient outcomes among minority and vulnerable populations (available in your MyABFM Portfolio). “That was a good start, but we knew there was more to be done,” Dr. Baxley explained. “We were aware that AAFP had a vision and commitment to address health equity as well. Our teams connected and began to explore how we could bring timely content to support what physicians were asking for.”

As it turns out, in 2014, AAFP's Center for Diversity and Health Equity acquired teaching materials that were designed as part of a nationwide effort known as Family Medicine for America's Health (FMAH). Many health organizations were involved in FMAH, but the AAFP recognized that they were being underutilized. After review, the staff and leaders from ABFM and AAFP agreed this content could be the basis for a new learning experience, while also offering certification credit.

"ABFM approached us and said they really loved the activity. They were interested in changing the focus of the material from 'training the trainer' to a more self-directed activity, consistent with a knowledge self-assessment (KSA). The primary question we were asking was, 'How do we make sure this is relevant and consistent for the individual physician?'" said Elizabeth Campbell, AAFP's Senior Operations Manager of Continuing Professional Development.

"The timing could not have been better," added Mark Evans, AAFP Product Marketing Manager. "The pandemic put health equity at the forefront of health care discussions. This was our chance to say, 'Here is a series that's important to your practice, but it's more than that. It affects everyone.'"

Dr. Erin Westfall, Assistant Professor of Family Medicine for the Mayo Clinic in Mankato, Minnesota, was among the first to try the new activity.

"As part of my work with the residency program here, I'm responsible for community health and engagement curriculum. How do we simplify this very large topic of Health Equity into bite size pieces that don't assume you come in with a passionate, foundational knowledge of the subject?" she asked. "I was excited to see how AAFP and ABFM broke the topic down. I appreciated that their activity starts at the individual level, assessing our bias and what we bring to each visit. With each module, it broadens to encompass policy, advocacy, even climate change."



Dr. Westfall's residents are now required to complete the activity, and many colleagues have engaged with it as well. The feedback, so far, has been tremendous.

"The residents who participated have found it extremely helpful," said Dr. Westfall. "It's really inspiring. Our health system is really thinking about how to assess wellbeing and outcomes in a meaningful way. There is a lot left to learn, but I appreciate ABFM and AAFP saying 'This is our lane. This is something we should all know fundamentally.'"

Health Equity: Leading The Change is now available to all physicians via AAFP's website. If you are not an AAFP member, simply create a free account to get started.

