Certification in Vascular Neurology
A New Subspecialty in the United States

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In 2003, the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology (ABPN) received approval from the American Board of Medical Specialties to issue subspecialty certificates in vascular neurology. Recognition was requested by the American Academy of Neurology. The new certificate acknowledges those ABPN-certified neurologists and child neurologists who have developed special expertise in the field of vascular neurology. The new subspecialty reflects the growth of cerebrovascular disease as an independent area of medical expertise and the related development of professional organizations such as the Stroke Council of the American Heart Association and the Stroke Section of the American Academy of Neurology. It also denotes the high level of scholarship in the area of vascular diseases of the central nervous system, as evidenced by the success of numerous journals such as Stroke, that focus on experimental, epidemiological, translational, and clinical research in this field.

Simultaneously, the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) endorsed postgraduate (fellowship) training in vascular neurology, which will be discussed in a separate report in Stroke. After the 2009 examination, only those neurologists who have successfully completed an ACGME-accredited program in vascular neurology will be eligible to become certified in this subspecialty. In the interim, applications will be accepted from those ABPN-certified neurologists or child neurologists who have had training in a non-ACGME accredited stroke fellowship or who devote at least 25% of their practice time to the diagnosis and treatment of persons with stroke. Information about the requirements and the application process is found at the ABPN website (www.abpn.com). The new certificates are valid for a 10-year period, which means that to retain certification status, certified physicians will periodically have to complete an ABPN maintenance of certification process including taking another examination.

**Test Development**

The ABPN appointed a 12-member committee to develop the content outline for the examination, to generate questions, to assemble the examination, and to set pass/fail standards. The members of the committee were selected to include a range of expertise in vascular neurology, and they participated in an independent certification process by writing essays. The examination for candidates consists of 200 multiple-choice questions that address the following topics: basic science aspects of vascular neurology, epidemiology, risk factors for stroke, prevention of stroke, clinical features of cerebrovascular disease, evaluation of patients, causes of ischemic or hemorrhagic stroke, treatment of patients with vascular diseases, and rehabilitation. The detailed content outline is posted on the ABPN website.

**First Examination**

The first examination was administered May 9–13, 2005, at a nationwide network of computer test centers. The internal consistency of the examination was robust, with a reliability of 0.89. The committee-determined pass/fail standard for the examination was 68%. The candidates’ mean correct score was 82% (SD=7%). Of the 238 neurologists taking the examination, 225 (95%) passed. The names of those who passed will appear in the 2006 edition of the Official American Board of Medical Specialties Directory of Board Certified Medical Specialists. In addition, a listing of the neurologists who are certified in vascular neurology can be found online at http://stroke.ahajournals.org.

**Future Examinations**

The next examination is scheduled for June 2006. The deadlines for application for that examination are posted at the ABPN website. It is anticipated that many more ABPN-certified neurologists and child neurologists who are actively involved in the diagnosis and treatment of patients with cerebrovascular diseases will seek this recognition.

**Appendix**

Diplomates of American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology in the Subspecialty of Vascular Neurology May 9, 2005—239 Diplomates

Nada G. Abou-Fayssal, MD, Hoboken, NJ
Aninda Bhat Acharya, MD, University City, MO
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