

# New HMDCB Certification Process Will Recognize Unique Skills of Hospice Physicians

Larry Beresford



As America's hospices confront the twin challenges of heightened regulatory demands (see fall 2012 *Quarterly*, page 14) and a limited pipeline of qualified new candidates to meet the need for competent medical directors (see fall 2013

*Quarterly*, page 12), a new credential will soon help to clarify the knowledge, skills, and understanding necessary to be an effective hospice physician.

Next spring the Hospice Medical Director Certification Board (HMDCB) will offer its first exam to certify hospice physicians in the essential clinical, professional, and administrative skills of the job. HMDCB is an independent, autonomous, non-profit organization established in 2012 with financial support from AAHPM. Those who meet prerequisites of experience in hospice-related work, board certification, or completion of a fellowship, and pass HMDCB's exam—given at more than 190 Applied Measurement Professionals (AMP) testing sites nationwide—will offer assurance to their agencies, prospective employers, and themselves that they have achieved competence in these areas.

Hospice Medical Director Certification (HMDC™) from HMDCB is different from and complementary to board certification in the medical specialty of hospice and palliative medicine (HPM), which is offered by the American Board of Medical Specialties and its constituent boards and by the American Osteopathic Association. "There is a broad range of knowledge and skills required in HPM and a narrower, more specialized field of knowledge for hospice medical directors," explains HMDCB Board Chair Gail Austin Cooney, MD FAAHPM, vice president of access for Hospice of Palm Beach County, West Palm Beach, FL.

"This new credential will help us to address the workforce shortage in HPM by giving physicians who are not eligible for HPM boards an option to document their knowledge and experience," she says. "A physician who seeks this certification wants to 'stand out' in the hospice field, which I believe will encourage more ongoing education and skill development."

Certification could be considered a subspecialty credential specific to hospice medical practice—in contrast to the primarily clinical and scientific content of the HPM boards. That practice involves additional expertise and unique competencies in such areas as compliance with Medicare regulations, functioning of the

hospice interdisciplinary group, and the management of total pain and other symptoms experienced by patients who have a prognosis of 6 months or less to live.

"Clearly, the role of the hospice medical director is changing. We're increasingly responsible for supporting patient eligibility and making decisions about covered services," Dr. Cooney says. "The government and our hospice agencies are looking for us to take a greater role in that decision making. I think this certification offers the opportunity to document expertise in the specifics of care under the Medicare hospice benefit." Although every Medicare-certified hospice must have a medical director, many of them are part-time and their agencies need confidence in their ability to take on these expanded roles.

## Categories of Specialized Knowledge

The 165 multiple choice test questions capturing that experience are now being written by a group of subject matter experts, and these will be vetted by other examination experts, says Brian Murphy, MD MBA FAAHPM, chair of HMDCB's Practice Analysis Committee and chief medical officer of Nathan Adelson Hospice, Las Vegas, NV. A detailed Content Blueprint for candidates ([www.hmdcb.org/blueprint](http://www.hmdcb.org/blueprint)) breaks down the content covered by the exam into five areas, with the proportion of questions devoted to each:

- patient and family care (17%)
- medical knowledge (26%)
- medical leadership and communication (21%)
- professionalism (10%)
- system-based practice (25%).

This defined content emerged from a 2-day meeting of diverse experts in the field discussing their jobs as hospice medical directors. Their collective responses, in the form of a practice analysis defining the actual content of a working hospice physician's job today, were then reviewed by 600 hospice physicians. "You can't test for what people aren't actually doing. We're testing for the knowledge you should have to do this job at a competent level," Dr. Murphy says. "We want to make sure we do it right and have a process that will be recognized as strong for the field, meeting national standards for certifying bodies by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies."

Bev Sloan, chief executive officer (CEO) of the Denver Hospice, Denver, CO, says she is looking forward to medical director certification. "It will help enlarge the pool of capable and trained physicians, which is very much needed," she

## HMDCB's Application and Testing Schedule

December 16, 2013-February 24, 2014	Application Cycle Open
February 25-March 24, 2014	Late Application Cycle (\$250 late fee assessed)
May 8-23, 2014	Examination Testing Window

says. "I don't know any hospice CEO who isn't concerned about where they'll get enough qualified physicians."

HPM board exams are more oriented toward palliative care and inpatient palliative care in particular, Sloan says. "Even those who have their HPM board certification could benefit from this certification." Sloan is also talking with palliative care leaders at Kaiser Permanente in Colorado about how they might collaborate on encouraging more physicians to pursue training to meet the certification.

Jack Strandmark, MD, corporate medical director of the multistate Grace Hospice, works with 20 part-time physicians who serve as its site medical directors. He says the certification process will help physicians see where their authority and responsibility begin and end. "It should offer significant opportunities to elevate the level not only of clinical skills but of administrative skills in one fell swoop. This is a working certification, so it will empower physicians and better integrate them into the hospice team, while promoting standardization of practice."

### Promoting and Recognizing Effective Practice

Although the goal for the certification initiative is to promote and recognize properly trained, qualified, effective hospice medical directors, HMDCB's role is not to provide the training but to identify those who have met established standards. It will, however, publish a *Candidate Handbook* later this year, detailing the process of earning and maintaining the HMDC credential.

"What this test does is give you a pathway to becoming certified in hospice medicine and to have something to give to employers," says Robert Hunter, DO FACOEP FACP, part-time associate medical director at Hospice of Miami Valley, Dayton, OH. "People like me, we don't have the option of taking a year off to do an HPM fellowship," in order to be able to sit for the board exam now that the experiential (non-fellowship) pathway to board certification has ended.

"My hospice said they would support me if I wanted to pursue certification. Would it mean more salary for the physician? Sometimes. But it will demonstrate to prospective employers that I have taken the extra time and effort to become hospice certified. In my mind, anything you can do to continue learning only benefits you in your career," says Hunter.

Exam applications will be available on the HMDCB website at [www.hmdcb.org](http://www.hmdcb.org) beginning December 16, 2013. The 2014 certification examination fee is \$950.

For more information on the certification program, eligibility criteria, and the content blueprint, visit [www.hmdcb.org](http://www.hmdcb.org), call 847.375.6740, or e-mail [info@hmdcb.org](mailto:info@hmdcb.org).

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## HMDC Resources

**AAHPM has several products to help you prepare for the HMDCB Exam next spring. These include**

### **New!** HMDC Prep

Great for self-assessment or HMDCB exam preparation, this 75 item multiple-choice practice test serves to assess your knowledge in hospice practice. Content is based on the HMDCB exam blueprint.

### Learning on Demand

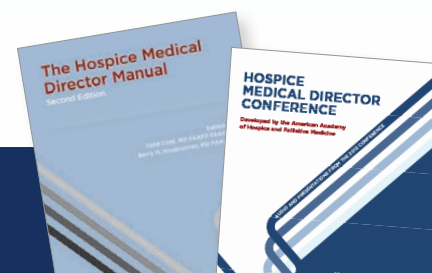
Developed with your needs in mind, this recording library of clinical regulatory content is in the AAHPM online bookstore.

### Hospice Medical Director Manual

This reference book, designed for physicians and managers, defines best practices; offers tools and sample documents for reference; and provides answers to your questions about physician roles in hospice, employment in or contracting with a hospice, and the medical director's responsibilities on the hospice team and within the organization.

### Recordings of the 2013 Hospice Medical Director Course

These recordings are great practice resources that highlight the clinical, administrative, and regulatory aspects of your work; they include audio and synchronized PowerPoint content and separate audio files.



Visit [www.aahpm.org](http://www.aahpm.org) to purchase these products.

*Note: AAHPM has no direct role or input in the development of the HMDC Exam. The Academy relies on the publicly published material about the exam to develop its products.*