

Why I Took the HMDCB Exam and How I'm a Better Physician Because of It



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HMDCB: What was it about the HMDCB certification program that appealed to you?

Jeremy Brown, MD HMDC: I appreciated the fact that the program measured both clinical and nonclinical knowledge. As a physician, most of my exams focus only on medical knowledge. As a hospice medical director, not only do I need the clinical knowledge to take care of patients, but I also need a baseline knowledge of the role of social workers, chaplains, bereavement staff, aides, nurses, and others within hospice. Furthermore, the certification program recognizes the need to be well versed in the regulatory guidelines that govern hospice. An intimate knowledge of the rules around face-to-face visits, conditions of participation, and team meetings are crucial for a hospice to thrive.

Why did you decide to apply?

I was encouraged by colleagues to apply, and I wanted to be certified by a national organization, stating that I met the requirements to be a hospice medical director. I missed the window to grandfather in and take the ABIM Hospice and Palliative Medicine Boards. This was a certification that would help validate my practice.

How has your preparation for the exam helped you now that you have achieved the HMDC?

There were some regulatory statutes and processes that I was not as familiar with before the exam that have come back and been helpful as our hospice team tries to care for patients.

The HMDC is your primary certification. Why have you decided to make it your primary?

Again, I missed the window to grandfather into the ABIM certification for hospice and palliative medicine. I am not fellowship trained, so I will not be able to obtain the ABIM certification.

We've heard from other certifiants who felt the exam was challenging but fair. Tell us about your experience taking the exam.

"Challenging but fair" is an accurate description. There are thousands of physicians who are associated with hospices in the role of medical director or associate medical director. Most of them are part-time and have clinical practices outside of hospice. The HMDC exam is a way to recognize those who have taken the time to be knowledgeable about the rules and regulations that govern hospice from those who only manage clinical symptoms.

If a colleague were to ask whether you feel they should strive to achieve the HMDC, what would be your advice to them?

I would say, "Absolutely!" The test is an accurate reflection of all facets of what it takes to be a hospice medical director.

What else would you tell a hospice physician who is on the fence about applying for the certification?

I believe that being a hospice medical director requires specialized training and skill sets just like other specialties such as sports medicine or cardiology. Becoming certified is a way to show the community you serve that you have the knowledge and skill set to care for your patients. It also shows current and potential employers that you're invested enough in hospice to maintain the highest standards of quality and integrity. With CMS watching hospice more closely in the past few years, we must be committed to providing quality care at a reasonable cost. Knowing and agreeing to abide by the rules hopefully will show CMS our commitment to these principles and ensure that hospice care remains an integral part of the continuum of care.

To learn more about HMDCB, please visit HMDCB.org.