

PATIENT VS. DOCTOR: PERSPECTIVE OF ABO CERTIFICATION

by

Patrick William Graves and Benjamin James Sikkenga

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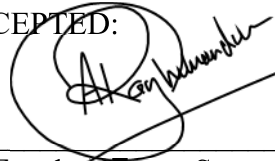
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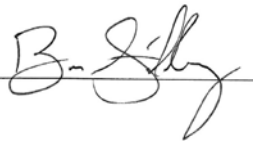


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PATIENT VS. DOCTOR: PERSPECTIVE OF ABO CERTIFICATION

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ABSTRACT

Background: Currently optometrists in Michigan are required to pass their boards through the National Board of Examiners in Optometry exams upon graduation as well as maintaining a set amount of continuing education credit in order to retain their license. In recent memory there has been more certification programs being introduced into the profession. This research project was created in order to investigate whether board certification, beyond our standard licensing parameters for optometrists, is important to not only optometrists themselves, but also to the patients they serve. *Methods:* A short survey with an educational excerpt on both the current NBEO (National Board of Examiners in Optometry) certification and the ABO (American Board of Optometry) certification processes was dispersed to (26) patients and 25 doctors throughout Michigan. The survey was intended to assess the opinions of each group on the need for doctors to be ABO certified in addition to the current requirements of the NBEO. The survey also included an additional question at the end requiring the participant to indicate qualities they believe are most important for an optometrist to possess. *Results:* 72% of doctors responded that ABO certification was semi-important, not important or completely unnecessary, while 81% of patients responded that ABO was semi-important, important or necessary. *Conclusions:* Patients felt that ABO board certification was more necessary than doctors did. Patients and doctors both agreed, when ranked amongst common doctoral traits, that quality of care/knowledge was most important and board certification was least important.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Currently optometrists in Michigan are required to pass their boards through the National Board of Examiners in Optometry exams upon graduation as well as maintaining a set amount of continuing education credit in order to retain their license. In recent memory there has been more certification programs being introduced into the profession. The certification programs being introduced are additional certification processes beyond graduation and the current boards standards already set in place. Two examples of these certification processes for practicing optometrists are the American Board of Optometry (ABO) certification and the American Board of Certification in Medical Optometry (ABCMO). The authors chose to focus on only one of these and mainly due to exposure, the authors in this research chose to evaluate the ABO certification. The intent is to compare and contrast the opinions of doctors of optometry and patients on the need for practicing optometrists to be board certified by an additional board (ABO in this case) beyond that which is already required.

The idea behind additional board certifications such as ABO is to ensure competency of optometrists well beyond their graduation. According to the ABO website their “purpose is to identify qualified eyewear providers by examination, urge growth of optical skills with continuing education, and approve continuing education programs.” It

is certainly within reason to state that all of the points they wish to ensure are those of a qualified optometrist. It is also within reason to state that an individual practicing optometry who does not meet these qualifications should not be practicing optometry.

The opposition however, can reasonably argue that all of the standards ABO is desiring to hold optometrists to are already required of practicing optometrists. The current standards for practicing optometrists in Michigan require each optometrist who wishes to obtain a license to pass the national board of examiners in optometry (NBEO) examinations. The current examination process includes two knowledge based assessments and one practical based assessment. After obtaining an optometric license, each optometrist who wishes to renew their license must also complete 40 hours of continuing education credits and submit documentation of these completions with their renewal application every two years.

It is this discrepancy in opinions we wish to shed light upon. This research project was created in order to investigate whether board certification, beyond our standard licensing parameters for optometrists, is important to not only optometrists themselves, but also to the patients they serve.

CHAPTER 2

METHODS

A short survey with an educational excerpt on both the current NBEO (National Board of Examiners in Optometry) certification and the ABO (American Board of Optometry) certification processes was dispersed to 26 patients (Appendix A) and (#) doctors (Appendix B) throughout Michigan. 17 doctor surveys were completed by optometrists attending a CE event at the Battle Creek Veterans Affairs Medical Center, 6 doctor surveys were completed by faculty at the Michigan College of Optometry, and 3 doctor surveys were completed by other West Michigan optometrists. 15 patient surveys were completed by patient's being seen at the University Eye Center at Ferris State University and 11 patient surveys were completed by patients being seen at Lakeshore Professional Eyecare. The survey intended to assess the opinions of each group on the need for doctors to be ABO certified in addition to the current requirements of the NBEO. The survey also included an additional question at the end requiring the participant to indicate qualities they believe are most important for an optometrist to possess.

The data from the surveys collected were sorted and analyzed by the researchers to compare and contrast the opinions of doctors and patients. The patient and doctor surveys were split in to two groups using the question asking if the participant is an optometrist. The demographics of the two separate groups were then analyzed by

averaging the age and finding the percentage of males and females. Each of the introduction questions had two forced-choice responses. The first question asked participants to the best of their knowledge if they felt optometrists should be board certified. The second asked if they had any prior knowledge of the current licensing process for optometrists. Finally, the third introduction question asked if the participants had any prior knowledge of the current ABO certification process. All three of these introduction questions were analyzed by using percentage of yes and no responses.

The participants were then provided with two educational excerpts; one on the current process of ABO certification and the other on the current standards for practicing optometrists in Michigan. The participants were then asked two follow-up questions. The data for the first follow-up question after the educational excerpts was analyzed using percentage of patients giving a specific response. This question pertained to how necessary the participant thought ABO certification is for doctors to obtain. The second follow up question after the educational excerpt regarded the qualities and traits of doctors and was analyzed totaling the responses for each ranking of a particular trait. These were then converted to percentages and compared between the two participant groups. The results of the data are shown below.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

A total of 51 surveys were completed by as many participants. There were 26 patient surveys completed and 25 doctor surveys completed. Of the 26 patients who completed surveys, the age ranged from 18 to 70 years old with the average age being 38 years old. There were 8 males (31%) and 18 females (69%). Of the 25 doctors who completed surveys, the age ranged from 25 to 64 years old with the average age being 39 years old. There were 13 males (52%) and 12 females (48%).

All of the doctors reported working in an optometric practice, having prior knowledge of the current licensing process for optometrists and of course, being an optometrist. About half of doctors (48%) felt that optometrists should be board certified prior to reading the informational excerpts, although 92% reported having prior knowledge of the ABO certification process which indicates their opinions may not change much as a group after the excerpts.

None of the patients reported having prior knowledge of the current licensing process for optometrists, having prior knowledge of the current ABO certification process and of course, being an optometrist. Only two patients (8.7%) reported having worked in an optometric practice, and two separate patients thought to the best of their knowledge

prior to reading the educational excerpts that optometrists should not have to be board certified (91.3% felt optometrists should be board certified).

The patient and doctor responses to the first follow-up question after the educational excerpts are summarized and compared in Figure 1. We see a trend of more doctor responses toward the ABO certification process being unnecessary and the patient responses trended to neutral or leaning towards important/necessary. 18 of the 25(72%) doctors responded that ABO certification was semi-important, not important or completely unnecessary, while 21 of the 26 patients (81%) responded that ABO was semi-important, important or necessary.

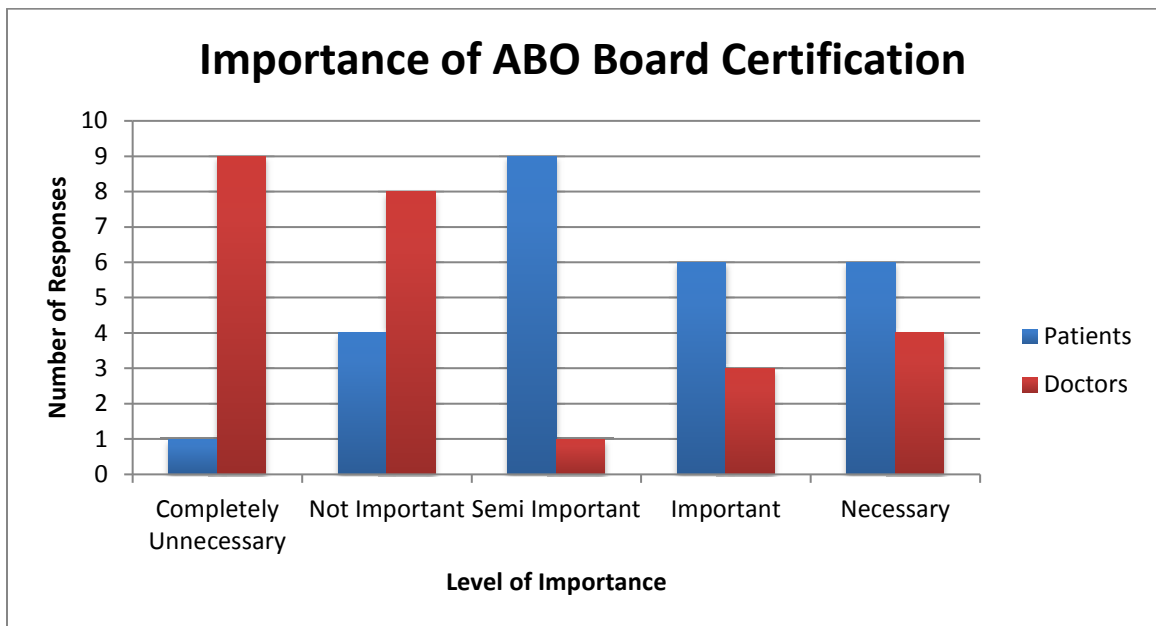


Figure 1. Comparison of results of the responses of patient and doctors to the first follow-up question following the educational excerpts.

The patient and doctor responses to the second follow-up question are summarized in Figure 2. The ranking with the highest percentage under each quality is

highlighted for both the doctor and the patient response groups. We see in figure 2 that the majority of patients and doctors agreed quality of care/knowledge was the most important trait for an optometrist to possess. The majority of patients and doctors also generally agreed that board certification was the least important trait for an optometrist to have. However, that is where the similarities ended. The middle three traits varied in order between patients and doctors. None of the other three traits had a majority of patients or doctors rank them the same. Although if we simply look at which traits received more second, third and fourth place rankings than any other trait we can get a very general sense of the order they fall in. For patients the over-simplified order would be (from first to fifth) quality of care/knowledge, hygiene/cleanliness, likability/personality and communication skills, and then board certification. For doctors the simplified order would be quality of care/knowledge, communication skills, likability/personality, hygiene/cleanliness, and then board certification.

What is Most Important to Patients when Choosing an Optometrist												
Ranking	Likability/ Personality		Quality of Care/ Knowledge		Communication Skills		Board Certification		Hygiene/ Cleanliness		Other	
	Dr.	Pt.	Dr.	Pt.	Dr.	Pt.	Dr.	Pt.	Dr.	Pt.	Dr.	Pt.
#1	12%	0.0%	68%	77.3%	16%	4.5%	0.0%	18.2%	0.0%	0.0%	4.0%	0.0%
#2	24%	18.2%	16%	18.2%	40%	18.2%	8.0%	9.1%	8.0%	31.8%	4.0%	4.5%
#3	36%	18.2%	12%	0.0%	32%	31.8%	8.0%	18.2%	8.0%	31.8%	4.0%	0.0%
#4	20%	36.4%	4.0%	4.5%	8.0%	36.4%	8.0%	0.0%	56%	22.7%	4.0%	0.0%
#5	4.0%	27.2%	0.0%	0.0%	4.0%	9.1%	64%	50%	28%	13.7%	0.0%	0.0%
#6	4.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	12%	4.5%	0.0%	0.0%	4.0%	0.0%

Figure 2. Table summary of the responses of patients and doctors to the second follow-up question following the educational excerpts.

Patients and doctors both had the option, as observed at the bottom of the patient and doctor surveys, of filling in an optional “other” trait they thought was important to include. One patient used the other category and filled it in with the trait of office atmosphere. Many different doctors exercised their option to fill in the other category and the responses varied. The responses filled in this category were location (twice), setting, insurance, and reputation.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

After analyzing the results of both surveys, it is apparent that patients and optometrists have differing views on board certification. 68% of optometrists felt that ABO certification was either completely unnecessary or not important. While we did expect to see this it was surprising that 28% of doctors felt ABO certification was important if not necessary (a greater proportion of this percentage leaned towards necessary). This could be due to the fact that residency trained VA doctors were present at the continuing education and participated in the survey. It is likely that due to their additional training, beyond what is required to become an optometrist, they would be more inclined to support further board certification. In order to achieve a better representation of optometry as a whole, future studies should attempt to reach a wider variety of optometrists and one that better represents the distribution of practice modalities (i.e. questions indicating the mode of practice of participant: commercial, education, private practice, government, etc.). While optometrists were more likely to be opposed to ABO certification, only 20% of patients surveyed thought that certification was not important or completely unnecessary. The majority of patients (36%) felt that ABO certification was at least semi important, and 48% of them voted for either important or necessary. We hypothesize that patients tend to lean towards ABO certification being important because they view it as optometrists being better qualified or

more educated if they have further board certification. As we mentioned with doctors, further studies should attempt to reach a larger quantity of patients and a varied clinical setting. The mode of practice a patient chooses to patronize could impact their responses to this question as well as the last follow up question about what traits they look for in an optometrist.

When it comes to what is most important to patients when choosing an optometrist, both patients and doctors felt that quality of care or knowledge was the most important factor. Some might use this finding to conclude that ABO board certification would be important because it seems to coincide with knowledge, but after looking at the remaining results, the majority of patients as well as doctors placed board certification at the bottom of their ranking. Aside from quality of care and board certification the rest of the options were more varied with none standing out when comparing doctor and patient responses. Doctors consistently rated likability and communication skills in their top three whereas patients had hygiene/cleanliness ranked higher on average.

In conclusion it is clear that there is a separation in the views on ABO certification with regards to patient and doctor's opinions with the doctors generally being against ABO certification and the patients leaning towards supporting it. However it is fair to point out that patients surveyed had little to no knowledge about licensing of optometrists which could make their opinions be more easily swayed by reading the excerpts. On the other had optometrists have far greater knowledge about the situation and may be biased from the onset one-way or the other. This can be directly observed when viewing figure 1 and noting the lack of doctors voting for the middle ground (semi-

important). While patients and doctors do split on whether they think ABO certification is needed/important, we can conclude that neither of them feels that being ABO certified is at all important when choosing an optometrist and that there quality of care ranks above all else. ABO certification isn't the only additional board certification in the optometry world and it would be worthwhile to include other programs or more specialty board certifications to the survey in the future. We must however keep in mind that the information given to the survey takers should be as unbiased as possible to avoid swaying their decisions towards the opinions of the surveyors.

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APPENDIX A

Demographics:

Age: _____

Sex: (Circle) M F

Highest education level: (✓ Choose one)

- No High School diploma
- High School diploma/GED
- Some College
- Bachelor's degree
- Graduate/Professional school
- Other: _____

Have you worked in an optometric practice?: (Circle) Yes No

Are you an optometrist?: (Circle) Yes No

Introduction:

To the best of your knowledge do you feel that optometrists should be board certified? (Circle)

Yes No

Do you have any prior knowledge of the current licensing process for Optometrists? (Circle)

Yes No

Do you have any prior knowledge of the current American Board of Optometrists certification process? (Circle) Yes No

Please read the excerpts below in order to answer the follow up questions:

Excerpt #1:

Currently American Board of Optometrists (ABO) board certification is not required to practice optometry in the United States. According to the ABO website, "ABO board certification is a process that allows doctors of optometry to demonstrate that they exceed entry level requirements and are maintaining the appropriate knowledge, skills and experience to deliver quality eye care." ABO board certification consists of an online exam created to evaluate knowledge and skills above entry level, and to confirm continuing competence. Certification must be maintained periodically (every 10 years).

Excerpt #2:

The current standards for practicing optometrists in Michigan require each optometrist who wishes to obtain a license to pass the national board of examiners in optometry (NBEO) examinations. The current examination process includes two knowledge based assessments and one practical based assessment. After obtaining an optometric license, each optometrist who wishes to renew their license must also complete 40 hours of continuing education credits and submit documentation of these completions with their renewal application every two years.

Follow-Up Questions:

After reading the above excerpts how important do you feel that it is for an optometrist to be (ABO) board certified? (Circle one)

Completely Unnecessary	Not Important	Semi-Important	Important	Necessary
1	2	3	4	5

Please rank the following in order of most (#1) to least (#5/6) important to you when choosing your optometrist.

- Likability/Personality
- Board Certification
- Quality of Care/Knowledge
- Hygiene/Cleanliness
- Communication Skills
- Other: _____

APPENDIX B

Demographics:

Age: _____
Sex: (Circle) M F
Highest education level: (✓ Choose one)

- ___ No High School diploma
- ___ High School diploma/GED
- ___ Some College
- ___ Bachelor's degree
- ___ Graduate/Professional school
- ___ Other: _____

Have you worked in an optometric practice?: (Circle) Yes No
Are you an optometrist?: (Circle) Yes No

Introduction:

To the best of your knowledge do you feel that optometrists should be board certified? (Circle)
Yes No
Do you have any prior knowledge of the current licensing process for Optometrists? (Circle)
Yes No
Do you have any prior knowledge of the current American Board of Optometrists certification process? (Circle) Yes No

Please read the excerpts below in order to answer the follow up questions:

Excerpt #1:

Currently American Board of Optometrists (ABO) board certification is not required to practice optometry in the United States. According to the ABO website, "ABO board certification is a process that allows doctors of optometry to demonstrate that they exceed entry level requirements and are maintaining the appropriate knowledge, skills and experience to deliver quality eye care." ABO board certification consists of an online exam created to evaluate knowledge and skills above entry level, and to confirm continuing competence. Certification must be maintained periodically (every 10 years).

Excerpt #2:

The current standards for practicing optometrists in Michigan require each optometrist who wishes to obtain a license to pass the national board of examiners in optometry (NBEO) examinations. The current examination process includes two knowledge based assessments and one practical based assessment. After obtaining an optometric license, each optometrist who wishes to renew their license must also complete 40 hours of continuing education credits and submit documentation of these completions with their renewal application every two years.

Follow-Up Questions:

After reading the above excerpts how important do you feel that it is for an optometrist to be (ABO) board certified? (Circle one)

Completely Unnecessary Not Important Semi-Important Important Necessary
1 2 3 4 5

What do you feel is most important to patients when choosing their optometrist? Please rank the following in order of most (#1) to least (#5/6) important.

- ___ Likability/Personality ___ Quality of Care/Knowledge ___ Communication Skills
- ___ Board Certification ___ Hygiene/Cleanliness ___ Other: _____