



American Board of Addiction Medicine And The ABAM Foundation

4601 North Park Avenue, Upper Arcade, Suite 101 • Chevy Chase, MD 20815-4520



Contact: Dennis Tartaglia
(732) 545-1848

dtartaglia@tartagliacommunications.com

For Immediate Release

OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS INSTALLED

TO LEAD THE AMERICAN BOARD OF ADDICTION MEDICINE

Chevy Chase, Maryland – January 2, 2012 – The American Board of Addiction Medicine (ABAM) and The ABAM Foundation today installed newly elected Directors and Officers. All are distinguished physicians and from a range of medical specialties. These volunteer Directors lead ABAM in the formal certification of physicians as experts in addiction medicine, establish and accredit physician post-graduate addiction medicine training programs, and thus advance the quality of medical care for substance use disorders related to alcohol, tobacco and other addicting drugs, including some prescription medications.

ABAM is an independent medical specialty board established in 2007 to certify addiction medicine physicians from several specialties, including emergency medicine, family medicine, internal medicine, obstetrics and gynecology, pediatrics, preventive medicine, psychiatry and other specialties. Prior to ABAM's formation, only one medical specialty (psychiatry) offered sub-specialized training and certification in addiction.

Trained addiction medicine physicians have now joined other addiction professionals in the interdisciplinary care of patients with addictive disorders. Physician specialists in addiction medicine bring unique skills and competencies to the treatment team, contributing to the care of individuals and families with a multitude of needs, using all appropriate treatment modalities.

“Addiction medicine is a unique field, encompassing elements of a range of medical specialties that come into contact with patients with addictive disorders,” said ABAM and ABAM Foundation President Jeffrey H. Samet, M.D., M.A., M.P.H. “We want addiction prevention, screening, intervention and treatment to become routine aspects of medical care wherever health care is provided. ABAM-certified physicians will also be able to address common medical or psychiatric conditions related to the use of addictive substances.”

Although one in five Americans entering the health care system has a substance abuse problem, there has never been a board certified medical specialty, drawn from all areas of

Phone: (301) 656-3378 • Facsimile: (301) 656-3815
E-mail: email@abamfoundation.net

medicine, dedicated to treating addiction. “Physicians are often at a loss for what to do about substance use and addiction issues, and may even misdiagnose the problem,” said Dr. Samet. “We hope to change this by expanding the cadre of board certified addiction medicine physicians across medical specialties.”

Studies show that fewer than one in five physicians consider themselves adequately prepared to diagnose alcoholism or other drug use disorders. Yet physician training in addiction medicine is sorely lacking. Separate courses in addiction medicine are rarely taught in medical school, and there are no addiction medicine residencies among the 9,026 Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) accredited residency programs in the nation’s hospitals.

To ensure that ABAM-certified physicians maintain life-long competence, ABAM offers a rigorous certifying examination developed by an expert addiction medicine committee and the National Board of Medical Examiners, as well as a maintenance of certification program. Nearly 2,600 physicians have been certified. Physicians from any specialty who are certified by a member board of the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS), or who have completed an ACGME-accredited residency in their primary field, may qualify to sit for the ABAM examination and become board certified in addiction medicine.

One of ABAM’s goals is to have a member board of the ABMS certify physicians in addiction medicine. Certification by an ABMS member board is considered the “gold standard” in physician credentialing. In a move to meet ABMS criteria, the ABAM Foundation has given its accreditation to 9 addiction medicine residency training programs affiliated with the nation’s top medical schools, and, when a sufficient number of residencies have been established, the Foundation will apply to ACGME to accredit these programs. At some time after ABMS recognition of addiction medicine, completion of an addiction medicine residency will be required by the ABMS member board which administers the certification process in addiction medicine.

A grant from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) to the University at Buffalo School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences will help establish a core of post-graduate addiction medicine education programs in academic medical centers throughout the United States. In announcing the grant, NIAAA Acting Director Kenneth Warren, Ph.D. said, “We are very excited about this opportunity to help medical students and residents in a variety of specialties who are interested in addiction medicine apply advances in research to real-world

practice. This critical investment in our nation's health will ultimately improve patient care and reduce the medical, social, and financial burden of the addiction disorders.”

ABAM was launched at a time of increasing promise for addiction treatment and at a time of increased need for treatment providers. Recent scientific discoveries have confirmed that addiction is a chronic disease of the brain caused by biological and developmental factors, with unique vulnerabilities and pathology, and a predictable course if not interrupted by effective treatment. An increasing number of medically based addiction treatments have recently become available, and more are on the horizon. The need for addiction medicine physicians will increase, as 30 million formerly uninsured Americans will have health insurance under the health care reform Affordable Care Act signed into law in 2010.

“Years of scientific research have proven drug addiction is a brain disease caused by biological, environmental and developmental factors—a disease which can have far reaching medical consequences. Given the proper training, tools, and resources, physicians can be the first line of defense against substance abuse and addiction--identifying drug use early, preventing its escalation to abuse and addiction, and referring patients in need to treatment,” said Nora D. Volkow, MD, Director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

For more information on ABAM, the ABAM 2012 Certification Examination, and the ABAM Foundation accredited residency training programs, please visit <http://www.abam.net>.

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