The Value of Licensure, Specialty Certification, Revalidation and Accreditation in Medicine: Challenges and Opportunities

John (Jack) R. Boulet, Marta van Zanten, Amy Opalek & Dale Dauphinee

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Purpose of Licensure?

The primary mandate of regulators (license givers) is:

• to ensure patient safety
• to restrict professional practice to only those who have demonstrated competence
What we can Hope to do Through the Licensure Process?
The Licensure Process

• Most professions throughout the world have some sort of licensure or certification (registration) process
  – Defines the profession
  – Individuals must meet certain requirements before they are allowed to practice
    • Requirements can vary!
Licensure versus Certification?

• **Licensure/Registration**
  – Generally granted by governments at national or regional level
  – Necessary for initial entry into the profession

• **Certification**
  – Usually conferred by non-governmental agency
  – Typically connotes a higher level of qualification
Criteria for Licensure

• Criteria upon which licensure (and certification) decisions are granted can be quite variable

  – Credentialing
  – Assessment
Credentialing

- Confirmation of medical school attendance and graduation
- Recognition of the medical school
- Verification of the diploma and/or transcript
  - Criteria for internationally trained doctors may differ
Assessment

• Successful completion of some set of examinations
  – e.g., USMLE
  • Basic Science
  • Clinical Knowledge
  • Clinical Skills
Accreditation

• The accreditation of medical education – certification of the suitability of medical education programmes, and of the competence of medical schools in the delivery of medical education – is of the highest importance.

• http://www.wfme.org/accreditation/whowfme-policy

• Accreditation can spur quality improvement. The challenge is to make it practical and affordable, particularly in less-wealthy countries
Accreditation

Definition
– A designated authority reviews and evaluates educational programs or institutions using clearly specified criteria and procedures on a cyclical basis

Goals
– Ensuring minimal quality standards are met
– Encouraging ongoing improvement
– Fostering international recognition
– Providing stakeholders with credible information

Accreditation systems vary considerably worldwide
Why are Credentialing and Accreditation Important?

• If a credentialing process is well-designed, it ensures that candidates seeking licensure (or certification) have achieved specific standards

• Accreditation drives institutions to improve quality
Evolution of Licensure

- Granted for the lifetime of the doctor
  - Movement towards maintenance of licensure (MOL)
  - Revalidation
  - Licensed doctors need to provide evidence that they have maintained their knowledge and skills
  - New assessment modalities
    - Evolving competencies
Challenges

• Relatively few studies that have shown the efficacy of licensure examinations or the “quantifiable” value of accreditation
Why so Little Evidence?

• Designing meaningful research studies
  – Available outcome measures
  – Need for longitudinal data
• Validity and reliability of evaluation measures
• Cost/ logistics

Kevin's new flight simulation game failed to live up to expectations
“The research evidence linking regulatory interventions and quality of care is sparse, mainly observational and descriptive, and does not, for the most part, allow for causal interpretations.”

Sutherland et al. (2006)
Validity

• Development of evidence providing “... a sound scientific basis for the proposed score interpretations”

• Do the assessments (as part of medical school or credentialing) provide measures of what they are supposed to?
Content Under-representation

DOCTOR PARKING ONLY
ALL OTHERS WILL BE TOWED AWAY
Performance with “Real” Patients

- Difficult to establish “predictive” value ... at least in the short term
  - Driver’s test
Other Challenges

- Cost
- Logistics
- Competency standards
Things to Think About

• Validity of licensing examination decisions?
  – Outcome measures
  – New assessments
    • Timing of assessments
  – Individual versus healthcare team

• Cost/benefit of regulatory or accreditation processes?
  – Value to the profession/society

• Consolidation of licensing bodies?
  – Shared materials (credentialing/examinations)
  – Economies of scale
  – Positive/negative impact (migration)