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For Immediate Release

AMERICAN BOARD OF MEDICAL SPECIALTIES RECOGNIZES THE NEW SUBSPECIALTY OF ADDICTION MEDICINE

Landmark Event Expected to Significantly Increase Number of Physicians Trained to Prevent and Treat Addiction

Bethesda, Maryland – March 14, 2015 – The American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) announced today the recognition of Addiction Medicine as a new subspecialty. The American Board of Preventive Medicine (ABPM), a Member Board of ABMS, sponsored the application for the new field to be a multispecialty subspecialty – meaning that physicians certified by any Member Board of the ABMS can become certified in addiction medicine. The ABMS subspecialty recognition of Addiction Medicine has been championed by the American Board of Addiction Medicine (ABAM), which has established a certification examination and Maintenance of Certification (MOC) process for addiction medicine physicians.

“This is a great day for addiction medicine,” said Robert J. Sokol, MD, President of ABAM and The Addiction Medicine Foundation (formerly The ABAM Foundation). “This landmark event, more than any other, recognizes addiction as a preventable and treatable disease, helping to shed the stigma that has long plagued it. It sends a strong message to the public that American medicine is committed to providing expert care for this disease and services designed to prevent the risky substance use that precedes it.”

Addiction medicine is defined as the prevention of the risky use of substances, including nicotine, alcohol, prescription medications and other licit and illicit drugs, and the evaluation, diagnosis, treatment and management of the disease of addiction and related health conditions. Physicians specializing in this field also help family members whose health and functioning are affected by a loved one’s substance use or addiction.

Certification by an ABMS-recognized specialty or subspecialty is considered the “gold standard” in physician credentialing, assuring patients that their physician meets the highest standards of practice and clinical knowledge, and has completed an approved educational program and process.

“This recognition by ABMS will help assure patients and their families that the care they receive is grounded in science and evidence-based practice,” added Patrick G. O’Connor, MD, MPH, Immediate Past President of ABAM, who worked closely with APBM and the ABMS Member Boards to help achieve this landmark event. “It will also mean more visibility for this subspecialty among medical

students and residents, and will ultimately increase the number of physicians who are trained and certified as addiction medicine specialists.”

The Addiction Medicine Foundation has supported the establishment of 40 addiction medicine fellowship training programs to date, based at major medical schools and hospitals across North America, and is committed to establishing a total of 125 fellowship programs by 2025. ABMS recognition opens the door for these fellowships to obtain accreditation through the Accreditation Council on Graduate Medical Education (ACGME), a process already underway.

Other benefits of ABMS recognition will include parity in organizational privileging of physician experts, insurance coverage for patients needing services, and reimbursement to physicians, hospitals, clinics and health systems that provide addiction medicine services. These changes provide incentives for our nation’s health care networks to invest in addiction prevention and early intervention in addition to treatment of advanced addiction and its complications.

Sixteen percent of the non-institutionalized U.S. population age 12 and over – more than 40 million Americans – meets medical criteria for addiction involving nicotine, alcohol or other drugs. This is more than the number of Americans with cancer, diabetes or heart conditions. In 2014, 22.5 million people in the United States needed treatment for addiction involving alcohol or drugs other than nicotine, but only 11.6 percent received any form of inpatient, residential, or outpatient treatment. Of those who do receive treatment, few receive evidence-based care. (There is no information available on how many individuals receive treatment for addiction involving nicotine.)

Risky substance use and untreated addiction account for one-third of inpatient hospital costs and 20 percent of all deaths in the United States each year, and cause or contribute to more than 100 other conditions requiring medical care, as well as vehicular crashes, other fatal and non-fatal injuries, overdose deaths, suicides, homicides, domestic discord, the highest incarceration rate in the world and many other costly social consequences. The economic cost to society is greater than the cost of diabetes and all cancers combined. Despite these startling statistics on the prevalence and costs of addiction, few physicians have been trained to prevent or treat it.

To address this vast unmet need, ABAM and The Addiction Medicine Foundation is committed to building the addiction medicine workforce; to date, 3,902 physicians have been certified by ABAM. While certification in the subspecialty of addiction psychiatry has been available from the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology since 1991, it is available only to psychiatrists. ABAM has also developed an Addiction Medicine Maintenance of Certification (MOC) program – a requirement for all ABMS-recognized specialties and subspecialties. ABAM MOC is a lifelong learning program that ensures that physicians remain current in their specialty and/or subspecialty’s standards of practice.

The American Board of Preventive Medicine (www.theabpm.org) as the sponsoring ABMS Member Board, will determine the new certification and MOC requirements for physicians entering the new subspecialty. Updates will be posted to the ABAM website, www.abam.net.