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The Maintenance of Certification Cartel

Years ago I flew to Washington, D.C., for a meeting. I redeemed some points on a credit card and upgraded to first class. On the return trip I sat next to a professional looking woman and asked her what she did for a living. She responded that she owned and operated a consulting business that helped manufacturers comply with new consumer product safety rules and regulations. "Wow," I said, "and what did you do before that?"

"I ran the Consumer Product Safety Commission in Washington, D.C.," she said as a matter of fact. She probably did not appreciate the uncontrolled laughter that followed.

What a racket! Invent new rules and regulations that no one knows about or understands, then charge them to figure out what you just did to them! This is nothing but delayed extortion, but I have heard rackets like this referred to as a cottage industry. Think of this as a type of parasite company that profits from the actions of the mother ship.

Cottage industries are commonplace these days. They are not that hard to find or identify if you are looking for them. All you have to do is identify some government agency or accreditation cartel, and surrounding this will be all sorts of parasitic individuals and companies that have found "an angle," or a way to capitalize on the morass of laws or regulations or rules.

Nowhere is this more common than in the medical business. Countless firms provide their services to help you learn new Medicare codes, or companies that provide conferences or continued education for coding or billing practices consistent with new rules and regulations. That new rules and regulations are issued every year guarantees that these companies will fill the ballrooms at large hotels with those hoping to avoid running afoul of whatever authority might threaten charges of non-compliance and the resulting penalties.

Continuing medical education is another racket that guarantees a large revenue stream to academicians in medicine, many of whom are impossibly poor communicators, and most of whom are conducting research that only the government would fund. This is another topic by itself. Even worse is the maintenance-of-certification racket exposed in the article by Martin Dubravec.¹

This process is extraordinarily costly (I know because I went through this fiasco in 1990). By the time you pay the board and the various cottage industries that have sprung up to help get through this, you have spent an incredible amount of money.

The cartel and cottage industry parasite that issues that special stamp (board certification) that physicians increasingly have to have is the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS). Though its assets exceed \$57 million, its thirst for loot has not been slaked. Not satisfied with making everyone pay to become board-certified, it was able to float board recertification for many specialties!

Its latest ploy is to team up with state licensure boards to require "maintenance of certification" status in order to preserve a medical license. Make no mistake. If the ABMS says, "It's not about the money; it's about maintaining the quality of medicine practiced," know that it's about the money! The ABMS knows that no one would do this voluntarily; hence, the need to force everyone to do it.

If Dr. Dubravec's article is widely read and circulated, the ABMS may find that it has overplayed its hand. This article is a bold factual exposure of shameless medical monopolists. Congratulations to the author and AAPS for publishing it. I eagerly await the AMA's rebuttal!

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¹ Dubravec M. Board certification/recertification/maintenance of certification: a malignant growth. *JAmPhysSurg* 2011;16:52-53.