

ACFAS Fact Sheet: Comparing ABFAS Board Certification and the ABPM Certificate of Added Qualification (CAQ)

Executive Summary

Patients, hospitals, payers, credentialing committees, and many others across medicine rely on objective and verifiable standards to assess physician qualifications. Within the specialty of podiatric medicine, there has been increasing attention to the comparability of board certification in podiatric foot and ankle surgery versus Certificates of Added Qualification (CAQs) that reference surgical practice.

Using only publicly available primary source materials, this document aims to provide a fact-based comparison of:

- The CPME-recognized surgical board certification administered by the American Board of Foot and Ankle Surgery (ABFAS), and
- The American Board of Podiatric Medicine (ABPM) Certificate of Added Qualification (CAQ) in Podiatric Surgery

To provide context for non-podiatric reviewers, the paper also presents how surgical board certification and CAQs function across the broader medicine landscape. Key documented takeaways:

- ABFAS board certification aligns with national surgical certifications, including mandatory peer-reviewed case evaluation and independent verification of surgical practice
- By contrast, the ABPM Surgical CAQ is a knowledge-based credential that is not recognized or accredited by CPME as a surgical board certification.

Purpose and Methodology

The purpose of this paper is to serve as a resource for prospective students, credentialing committees, payers, and other interested stakeholders by presenting a clear, verifiable comparison of professional credentials related to podiatric foot and ankle surgery.

Regulatory and Educational Context

CPME Recognition and Scope: The Council on Podiatric Medical Education (CPME) is the nationally recognized authority for accreditation of podiatric medical education programs and recognition of specialty certifying boards.

CPME Statement on CAQ's¹: "The Council on Podiatric Medical Education (CPME) is responsible for the specialty board and subspecialty certification approval and recognition process on behalf of the podiatric medical profession. The CPME does not recognize, accredit, or approve any Certificates of Added Qualifications (CAQs) within its policies and procedures for specialty board recognition. CAQs are not equivalent to board certification or subspecialty certification, nor can they lead to certification or subspecialty certification in any specific content area. CPME's position on CAQs remains unchanged and consistent with its longstanding practice. Recent revisions to the CPME 220 Standards and Requirements and the CPME 230 Procedures ([available here](#)) do not alter this position."

CPME further identifies:

- ABFAS as the CPME-recognized specialty certifying board for podiatric surgery, and

- ABPM as the CPME-recognized specialty certifying board for primary podiatric medicine and podiatric orthopedics.²

Category	ABFAS Board Certification	ABPM CAQ in Podiatric Surgery
Credential type	Board Certification in Foot Surgery and/or Reconstructive Rearfoot/Ankle (RRA) Surgery	Certificate of Added Qualification (CAQ) in Podiatric Surgery
CPME recognition	Yes. ABFAS is the only surgical certifying board for foot and ankle surgery in the U.S. recognized by the Council on Podiatric Medical Education (CPME) ³	No. A CAQ is issued solely by the ABPM and is not recognized by the CPME. ⁴
Surgical Board status	Recognized as the certifying board for the specialty area of podiatric surgery ²	Recognized as the certifying board for the specialty areas of podiatric orthopedics and primary podiatric medicine ²
Exam includes cognitive assessment	Didactic and computer-based simulation examinations ⁵	Knowledge-based examination ⁴
Scope	Assessment of surgical competence including case review ⁵	Knowledge-based examination in podiatric surgery ⁴
Surgical case review requirement	<p>Required.⁵</p> <p>ABFAS board certification includes a mandatory Case Review component, which requires:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Logging of all surgical cases as surgeon of record using the ABFAS Podiatric Log System (PLS) • Selection by ABFAS of surgical cases from the candidate's PLS case log. • Submission of complete operative medical records, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ History and physical ○ Imaging ○ Operative reports ○ Pathology/labs (if applicable) ○ Progress notes and consults ○ Anesthesia and circulator records 	<p>Not required as part of the examination process.</p> <p>ABPM describes the CAQ as a credential awarded after passing a "validated, knowledge-based examination."⁴</p>

Facility Audit	ABFAS conducts a facility audit, selecting a hospital or surgical facility and time period to verify that all cases were logged, supported by attestation from the facility's Director of Medical Records ⁵	Not described as part of the CAQ credentialing process. ⁴
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Comparison Surgical Certification & CAQ Models Across Medicine

Across U.S. medicine, surgical board certification is overseen by specialty boards, most commonly member boards of the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS).⁶ Common elements across ABMS-recognized surgical specialties include:

- Completion of accredited surgical training
- Cognitive (written) examination
- Documentation of operative experience
- Peer-reviewed evaluation of clinical decision-making and surgical practice, often via oral or case-based examinations

Examples include:

- American Board of Orthopaedic Surgery⁷ (ABOS)
- American Board of Surgery⁸ (ABS)
- American Board of Plastic Surgery⁹ (ABPS)

These surgical boards evaluate both knowledge and documented clinical or operative experience as part of certification processes intended to assess competence in surgical practice.

Across medicine, additional credentials such as Certificates of Added Qualification (CAQs), designations are used to recognize additional expertise beyond primary board certification. These credentials are designed to supplement, rather than replace, primary specialty certification.

Examples include:

- Sports Medicine CAQ - American Board of Family Medicine¹⁰ (ABFM)
- Focused Practice in Hospital Medicine - American Board of Internal Medicine¹¹ (ABIM)
- Pain Medicine subspecialty certification - American Board of Anesthesiology¹² (ABA)

Common characteristics:

- Knowledge-based examinations
- Narrow, focused scope
- Not substitutes for primary or surgical board certification

Conclusion

A fact-based, cross-specialty comparison demonstrates that ABFAS board certification represents a comprehensive, independently validated surgical certification recognized by the Council on Podiatric Medical Education (CPME), consistent with how surgical competence is assessed across other U.S. surgical specialties. The ABPM Surgical CAQ, by contrast, is described by ABPM as a knowledge-based credential and is not recognized by CPME.

Footnotes & Sources

1. Council on Podiatric Medical Education. *Statement on Certificates of Added Qualifications (CAQs)*.
<https://www.cpme.org/>
2. Council on Podiatric Medical Education. *List of Recognized Specialty Boards*
<https://www.cpme.org/specialty-certifying-boards/list-of-recognized-specialty-boards/>
3. American Board of Foot & Ankle Surgery – *Become Board Certified*
<https://www.abfas.org/become-board-certified/abfas-response-to-the-abpm-caq>
4. American Board of Podiatric Medicine – *What is a CAQ*
<https://podiatryboard.org/caq/>
5. American Board of Foot and Ankle Surgery – *Become Board Certified; all sections*
<https://www.abfas.org/become-board-certified>
6. American Board of Medical Specialties – *ABMS Overview*
<https://www.abms.org/about-abms>
7. American Board of Orthopaedic Surgery Certification
<https://www.abos.org/certification/>
8. American Board of Surgery Certification
<https://www.absurgery.org/get-certified/general-surgery/>
9. American Board of Plastic Surgery Certification
<https://www.abplasticsurgery.org/candidates/oral-examination/oral-examination-process-requirements/>
10. American Board of Family Medicine. *Sports Medicine CAQ*.
<https://www.theabfm.org/added-qualifications/sports-medicine/>
11. American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) *Focused Practice Designation*.
<https://www.abms.org/member-boards/focused-practice-designation/>
12. American Board of Anesthesiology. *Pain Medicine Exam; available at the ABA subspecialty certification pages*
<https://www.theaba.org/subspecialty-exam-type/pain-medicine-exam/>

The American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons is a professional society of over 8,100 foot and ankle surgeons. Founded in 1942, the College's mission is to advance excellence in foot and ankle surgery to achieve superior patient outcomes.