

The ABLS as a Medical Board vs. Other Professional Societies

From time to time, the Board receives questions about the American Board of Laser Surgery, Inc. (ABLS) versus other professional laser and cosmetic organizations, and how these are similar or different. To help avoid any confusion as there can be similarities in the names, it is important to provide the distinction between our organization and others.

- The ABLS (founded in 1984) is a medical specialty board devoted to the preparation, testing and certification of qualified laser medical practitioners in the fundamental physics, bio-tissue interaction, and safety related to the use of lasers in medicine and surgery. The Board's certifications also extend to the fields of laser cosmetics and dentistry with additional study materials and examinations. We have several hundred Diplomates worldwide who have completed the Board's certification. We are highly regarded by our Diplomates as well as many organizations. For example, we are approved by the Southern Medical Association (SMA) to offer *AMA PRA Category 1 Credits™* as Continuing Medical Education; we have a working partnership with the American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery (AACCS); and we provide the accreditation examination for advanced aestheticians for the State of Oregon's Board of Certified Advanced Estheticians (BCAE) and its Health Licensing Office. We have numerous relationships as the exclusive examination provider with both US and overseas laser education organizations and programs. *We are currently the only medical specialty board in the world devoted to medicine using lasers, light and other energy-based devices.* Hundreds of ABLS Diplomates over the past 30 years have found the Board's certification process to be of great value for both new learning and to enhance the quality and safety of their medical practices!
- Other organizations can be highly regarded medical professional membership societies that host annual meetings which provide many lectures and courses on various topics of lasers and other energy devices in medicine and surgery, as well as other educational activities. Professional societies also often publish journals, provide lists of member physicians for the public, and other related activities. They are however not medical testing and certification boards unless specifically stated as such. As an example, The American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery (AACCS) is a professional society but also has a related medical board, The American Board of Cosmetic Surgery (ABCS).

The ABLS does not directly provide training meetings, nor publish a journal. The ABLS does provide a detailed treatment of laser physics, bio-tissue interaction, and safety in its study materials, as well as a comprehensive series of examinations, both written and oral. In addition, the ABLS certification does not require membership fees in a professional society, attendance at an in-person meeting, nor the associated travel time and cost.

Questions on Recognition

Questions sometimes arise relative to recognition or inclusion of the ABLS by the ABMS (American Board of Medical Specialties). *The simple fact is that the ABMS does not recognize laser medicine as a separate medical specialty.* If you are reading this and principally practice laser and light energy medicine, the ABMS does not view *your field* as a medical specialty. As a result, they have not recognized any medical board that principally deals with laser and light energy medicine. While many professional societies devoted to lasers and light energy devices exist both in the US and worldwide, these societies address a medical specialty that the ABMS doesn't to date consider a separate medical specialty.

The ABLS believes that this simply does not recognize the developments in laser and light energy medicine over the past three decades. The ABMS in fact has not recognized any new major medical boards (beyond its current 24) since the early 1990s. In addition, many states in the US lack consistency in regulating laser and light medicine, some with good oversight and others with very little. Other countries' oversight also varies greatly as well, with some countries having extensive requirements for laser and light energy medicine while others have very little.

When the ABLs was founded in 1984, we knew unequivocally that oversight, education, testing and certification were (and are) needed; and therefore, it was important to have a medical specialty board devoted to the efficacious and safe use of lasers and light energy devices in medicine. Lasers for example are highly complex instruments, and the Board believes medical laser practitioners need to understand the details of how they work, through a process of rigorous study, and written and oral examinations.

There are many other important medical specialties and boards that the ABMS has also chosen not to recognize, but that make valuable contributions to medicine, its practitioners and patients. Among these are The American Board of Cosmetic Surgery, The American Board of Cosmetic and Aesthetic Medicine, The American Board of Aesthetic Medicine, The American Board of Anti-Aging / Regenerative Medicine, and others. *The most important reason for any certification is the knowledge gained and the ability to provide the best for patients.*

ABLS Recommendations for Sensible Oversight by US State Regulatory Bodies

The Board has developed a comprehensive open document provided to all 50 state medical authorities entitled: *“The Pressing Need for the Understanding of, and Regulations for, Lasers and Light Energy Devices as Used in Today’s Cosmetic and Other Medical Procedures”*. We have this document posted on our website, accessible via the link [“Oversight Recommendations”](#) under our Resources tab. We are unique in having developed and disseminated this type of document.

How Diplomates May List Their ABLs Credentials

How our Diplomates may refer to their ABLs credential, as in many aspects of listing or advertising professional medical credentials, depends on the various regulations that exist across the 50 US states and US territories, as well as other countries. The options may include “board certified by the ABLs”, “certified by the ABLs”, “holder of the ABLs certificate”, “Diplomate of the ABLs”, “credentialed by the ABLs”, “completed the ABLs examinations”, and other variations. The ABLs encourages all Diplomates to list their credentials in a manner that complies with applicable state and local regulations.

We encourage any Diplomate who feels unfairly treated to contact the appropriate body or authority and point out the legitimate need. And we stand to help!

The Board sincerely hopes this provides important information and clarification. Please email us at lasers1060@gmail.com for any further questions. Thank you very much.