

## The ABFAS LEAD Continuous Certification Program

By Jonathan Golike, ABFAS Director of Certification Services

“Have you completed your LEAD assessment yet?” This phrase is increasingly heard by ABFAS Board Certified DPMs (or Diplomates) at conferences, hospitals, and podiatry offices.

To those who may be unaware, the ABFAS LEAD Continuous Certification Program is a longitudinal assessment that replaced the once-every-10-year recertification exam. It consists of short quarterly online assessments and is now how ABFAS Diplomates maintain and renew their certification. While a major change to certification requirements can be a very difficult proposition, the LEAD program serves as a great success story and a huge benefit for busy foot and ankle surgeons.



possibility of changing the recertification exam to a longitudinal assessment. While the overall response to a change to a longitudinal assessment was positive, ABFAS received plenty of feedback. Many had concerns about the program’s impact on their schedules or whether the new program could cause them to lose their certification. ABFAS worked hard to design a program that worked for all ABFAS Diplomates.

### LEAD Catches On

Nearly 500 ABFAS Diplomates agreed to take part in the 2021 LEAD Pilot Program. Their participation and feedback was vital, as ABFAS continued to refine the LEAD program in advance of the anticipated full program rollout in January 2022. ABFAS staff and volunteers worked overtime during the last months of 2021 to ensure Diplomates could easily access and understand the new program, implementing a comprehensive communication plan that started a year in advance of the program launch and continued throughout the first year of the program. Clear and consistent communication about the change and the benefits of the LEAD program was integral to Diplomate buy-in to the new program.

**As program adoption increases, ABFAS continues to use Diplomate feedback to mold the program to their needs.**

### Creating LEAD

The LEAD Continuous Certification Program launched in 2022, but the foundation was set years prior. During the presidential term of then-ABFAS President Christopher Lotufo, DPM, FACFAS, ABFAS leadership recognized the imperative to modernize the recertification process to stay current with American Board of Medical Specialties requirements and better meet the evolving needs of Diplomates. They also identified the necessity for a philosophical shift to support Diplomates in keeping their knowledge, judgement, and skills up to date over the course of their career—rather than having a once-every-ten-year interaction.

ABFAS began actively researching how to implement a longitudinal assessment, visiting with the American Board of Anesthesiology and the American Board of Pediatrics, which had both launched longitudinal assessments. We also established the Continuous Certification Committee, started working with a longitudinal assessment software vendor, and began development on what would become the LEAD program.

### LEAD for All

For a program like LEAD to be a success, it requires both hard work from staff and volunteers and buy-in from members. ABFAS emailed a survey to all ABFAS Diplomates in September 2019, asking for their input regarding the

### Continuous Certification, Continuing Improvements

As of the start of 2024, 92% of ABFAS Diplomates have completed at least one quarter of the LEAD program. For the monumental shift to the recertification process that the LEAD program represented, this is an astounding adoption rate, and we applaud the commitment of ABFAS Diplomates to maintain and increase their knowledge through participation in the LEAD program.

As program adoption increases, ABFAS continues to use Diplomate feedback to mold the program to their needs. In 2023, ABFAS received approval from the Council on Podiatric Medical Education to offer Continuing Medical Education credits for each completed quarter of LEAD, and in 2024, ABFAS decreased the number of questions from 30 to 20 so that ABFAS Diplomates can spend less time on LEAD and more time with patients.

ABFAS has big plans for the future of the LEAD program. In the coming year, we will add the ability for Diplomates to select practice-specific content areas for their LEAD assessments to complement core subject areas. We also continue to improve the LEAD program site and assessment functionality to make it easier for Diplomates to complete their LEAD assessments and access correct answers, references, and rationales that help them keep their knowledge up to date.

*Interested in learning more about the ABFAS LEAD program? Visit [abfas.org/lead](http://abfas.org/lead) or [click here](#).*