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## **An Open Letter to the Board of Certification/Accreditation International's (BOC's) Certificants, Accredited Facilities, and Other Key Stakeholders**

July 7, 2011

We are communicating with you today to emphasize and clarify BOC's continuing commitment to what has become known as "The Historic Agreement."

Signed in 2008 by the leaders of five of the national organizations representing the clinical, business, and quality improvement aspects of the Orthotic and Prosthetic (O&P) professions, the agreement was the result of discussions to forge a consensus regarding the minimum standards necessary for education and training of providers of custom Orthotics and Prosthetics. The five organizations were:

- American Academy of Orthotists and Prosthetists (AAOP)
- American Board for Certification in Orthotics, Prosthetics and Pedorthics (ABC)
- American Orthotic and Prosthetic Association (AOPA)
- Board of Certification/Accreditation International (BOC)
- National Association for the Advancement of Orthotics and Prosthetics (NAAOP)

This letter was prompted by questions received as BOC representatives traveled to conferences and meetings across the country.

The most frequent question we've been getting this year from practitioners is, "Will the new requirements as of January 1, 2013 affect current BOC practitioners?" The answer to that is that a practitioner who is a BOC Orthotist (BOCO®) and/or Prosthetist (BOCP®) prior to this date and who remains in good standing will not need to fulfill the 2013 requirement. This "grand-fathering" is a standard practice in any profession when requirements change.

These changes will not affect current or future BOC-certified Pedorthists (BOCPD™), Orthotic Fitters (COF®), or Mastectomy Fitters (CMF®).

The other concern that is frequently shared comes from Board-eligible Orthotists and Prosthetists, who ask if the requirements will be changed for those already "in the pipeline." The reason the agreement allowed for a four year implementation process was so prospective certificants who were preparing to earn certification would not be penalized by changing minimum requirements. Candidates who complete the current eligibility requirements and submit their applications as of December 31, 2012, will proceed under the requirements that were in effect on the date of application. Any candidates who apply after January 1, 2013 will need to be in full compliance with the new standards.

Now that we're more than halfway through the "pipeline" period, we believe the reasons behind

the agreement are more valid than ever. Advances in technology, materials, equipment, and treatment options will require incoming practitioners to know more and have a common solid educational background, positioning them for lifelong continuing education.

The new standards will require a minimum of a bachelor's degree. Candidates must earn that degree at an institution accredited by CAAHEP (Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Programs) or earn a bachelor's degree and then complete a certificate in Orthotics and/or Prosthetics at a CAAHEP-accredited educational institution. The latest list of CAAHEP-accredited programs may be found at <http://www.ncope.org/>. There you will see that the profession is going to an all-Master's minimum. NCOPE's transition plan will allow for enrollment in post-baccalaureate certificate programs through 2014; most if not all certificate programs will be closed by then.

The standards also require training in the form of a minimum of one year of structured clinical affiliation, also known as a "residency," under the direct supervision of a duly certified individual in the same discipline.

Higher educational requirements are almost inevitable as professions mature. We're seeing it in any number of fields. This greater stature of O&P will attract more students, which ultimately will lead more educational institutions to establish O&P programs.

The end result will be that BOC will grow, providing certification to an even larger number of practitioners, who will be positioned to meet the growing demand for their services. In the meantime, we continue to pursue increased collaboration with our sister O&P organizations, working together for the advancement of patient care.

We'd also like to point out three associated changes, not necessarily immediate but all of them positive. These are:

- greater respect and stature for O&P among the health professions
- more schools establishing O&P programs
- continued growth for BOC as a certification provider

Thank you for your continuing support of BOC. Even as the world around us changes, we are committed to preserving our history and heritage as an organization that cares. We're just as dedicated as ever to serving you, so you can serve your patients.

Let us know if you have any other questions, and we'll do our best to answer them.

Sincerely,



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