The term 'board eligible' has never been recognized by member boards of the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS), including the ABFM, but the term continues to be used by credentialing organizations and others to recognize non-certified physicians as having equivalent status. The abuse of the board eligible term and status perpetuated the ability of poorly qualified physicians to practice outside of their initial certification with a risk to patients and resulted in a lack of relationship between the initial certifying examination and training as a concurrent/synergistic measure of physician competency.

In an effort to resolve this confusion for credentialers and patients, all member boards of the ABMS agreed to establish parameters under which non-certified physicians could actually be recognized as being board eligible and to further define the time limit for such board eligible status.

The ABFM Board of Directors concluded in October 2011 that it would define board eligibility as (1) the 7-year period that begins January 1, 2012, for any physician eligible to apply for certification prior to that date; (2) the 7-year period that begins upon the date of successful completion of an ACGME accredited Family Medicine residency training program, on or after January 1, 2012, in accordance with all ABFM policies and procedures (or upon successful application for reciprocity as defined by our reciprocity agreements); or (3) the 7-year period that begins upon the date of loss of certification on or after January 1, 2012.

In order to represent him or herself as board eligible, the physician must comply with the Guidelines for Professionalism, Licensure, and Personal Conduct. In addition, the physician must continue to meet the requirements for MC-FP or the MC-FP Entry or Re-Entry processes.

After expiration of the 7-year period of board eligibility, a family physician can regain eligibility only by successfully completing at least one year of additional training in an accredited family medicine residency-training program (or an ABFM approved alternative) and completing the MC-FP Re-Entry Process.