

The importance of professional recertification

The vision of the *Sociedad Argentina de Cardiología* (SAC) is defined as generating and transmitting knowledge, and as establishing medical quality standards; its mission is that of being the scientific landmark in cardiology for the medical community, the government, and the society as a whole. These goals are reached mainly through professional training, promotion of scientific research, and medical quality control; regarding the community, through spreading information about cardiovascular diseases, basically about their prevention.

As regards medical quality improvement and professional training, the SAC developed a professional recertification system more than 12 years ago, which has been evaluating more than 3,000 colleagues, whether for a first-time recertification or for a new recertification. This certificate is awarded by the SAC together with the *Asociación Médica Argentina* (Argentine Medical Association).

What is the purpose of recertification?

First and foremost, its purpose is to contribute to the improvement of the healthcare system through encouraging ongoing training for professionals. Dedicated physicians in ongoing training translates into better care for patients, who are the main target of our efforts.

Recertification, also called 'certification maintenance' in certain fields, is closely linked to the concept of continuing medical education. Historically, the SAC has held the concept that recertifying means having fulfilled the previously defined and accepted standards of continuing education. Recertification is a voluntary act based on the revision of a specialist's professional practice; it is an evaluation carried out by peers and is not related to the legal accreditation as a medical practitioner. It deals with the physician's self-commitment to show his/her skills and experience to the professional community. The recertification is a grade of excellence.

It is worth mentioning that a formal demand of upgrading should go hand in hand with an educational offer that facilitates the required professional upgrading. In this regard, and according to its view, the SAC has progressively increased the 'educational offer'.

In terms of professional training, the SAC has provided a long and fruitful record of success in post-graduate training. The educational offer available for physicians is varied; there is the annual Argentine Congress of Cardiology, the annual Conferences of the Regional Districts; the University Specialist Degree in Cardiology; courses on subspecialties such as echocardiography, ergometry, and more; seminars and symposiums of the 19 Scientific Boards; teaching activities in their 36 Regional Districts, as well as other

types of meetings. The sponsorship the SAC provides to many teaching activities carried out in different institutions –which give credits for recertification– should also be mentioned.

The Program for Continuing Education in Cardiology, PROSAC, has also been added to this great variety of resources. As it is known, it consists of a paid ongoing distance-learning program, with printed and electronic material, and evaluations.

The topics of the program will be permanently renewed. Once the modules of the program are attended and passed for five years, both this program and the attendance to the Argentine Congress of Cardiology together provide the necessary credits for recertification.

Research is another item that provides credits for recertification. In this regard, the SAC also offers two annual events for cardiologists in which they can present their scientific production in order to be evaluated by their peers.

In recent years, the analysis about the applicants in the latest recertification cycles shows that the number of professionals entering for recertification more than once is larger than the number of colleagues entering for first-time recertification. This may be due to two reasons: first, there was an initial 'restrained demand' that was included into the system in the first calls, and second, it may be inferred there is a group of professionals who stay in the system because they consider it useful. However, there is another group of professionals who do not believe in or perceive the importance of recertification. The reasons that may cause this feeling in colleagues are varied, but probably the main one is that the healthcare system in general fails to recognize the recertified physician as such, compared with the professional who has not been recertified. Indeed, the physician attending continuing educational programs is not duly recognized in labor terms yet. Moreover, there are different systems all over the country to obtain recertification, and their requirements are different from the ones stated by the Scientific Societies and by other academic institutions. In this regard, the historical position of the SAC has been to argue that scientific societies and universities are the most qualified entities to provide recertification.

Once requirements are met, both the *Sociedad Argentina de Cardiología* and the *Federación Argentina de Cardiología* agreed on a reciprocal recertification system, that is, the recertification provided by one of these entities is recognized and guaranteed by the other, upon request of the interested professional.

Nevertheless, recertified physicians are gradually becoming more recognized in certain organizational

levels. Little by little, and even though it is not mandatory yet, both public and private organizations as well as the authorities are ranking the recertified professional as opposed to the one who is not recertified. Some healthcare providers recognize recertified professionals.

In the Justice field, for instance, the International Judicial Academy, based in the United States and with an important affiliate in Argentina, has been trying for some years to bring the judges to the medical sciences, and viceversa. To do that, it has been working together with Scientific Societies, among other organizations. The SAC has been collaborating actively with that institution. For instance, our Society has participated in interesting discussions between judges and physicians, in which different common issues were discussed. One of them is the training and refreshing of experts intervening in court cases. Among the issues discussed and agreed upon in this field, there is the need for professional recertified experts to ensure their opinions and judgements reflect the current and everyday concepts in each specialty. This will make judges' tasks easier. Moreover, in case a colleague finds himself involved in any instance of a legal process, to

be recertified is a tool that supports his opinions or situation before his peers.

As we have said before, recertifying means to undergo evaluation from peers and to prove a continuing educational process. We should take the example of a great number of colleagues who, despite their proven track record, continue undergoing recertifications voluntarily, because this is one of the elements that keeps them at the top of the professional level they reached with their own effort.

The *Sociedad Argentina de Cardiología* promotes and sustains the recertification process as an indispensable part of the continuing medical educational process. Also, and together with other scientific and academic institutions, another goal has been to promote the characteristics and advantages of that process for the different actors in the health system. The final goal would be the obligatory nature of the periodic recertification, as a professional requirement to continue the practice of his/her speciality.

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