



Spotlight On Robert J. Boland, MD, Houston, TX

Dr. Boland is Professor and Vice Chair of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Baylor College of Medicine, The Brown Foundation Endowed Chair in Psychiatry at Baylor, and the Chief of Staff at the Menninger Clinic in Houston, TX. He is currently Vice Chair of the ABPN Board of Directors.

Why did you want to join the ABPN Board?

My career has largely been devoted to education. Over the years, I have served as a supervisor, lecturer, clerkship director, residency director, and, in my current role as Chief of Staff at the Menninger Clinic, as a mentor and educator for our faculty.

Through these experiences, I became increasingly interested in a fundamental question: how do we know when learners have achieved competence, are ready for independent practice, and ultimately have become excellent psychiatrists? That interest led me to organizations focused on assessment and professional standards, including the NRMP, PRITE, and the ACGME.

Joining the ABPN was a natural extension of that work. The Board plays a uniquely important role in defining and assessing the knowledge, skills, and competencies expected of specialists in our field.

What do you want to achieve with the ABPN Board?

In my original letter of interest to the ABPN, I identified several areas where I hoped to contribute. One was the ongoing debate around continuing certification. While I have always believed that board certification and lifelong learning are important, I also felt there were opportunities to make the process more relevant, practical, and meaningful for physicians.

I was also interested in strengthening the ABPN's relationships with key stakeholder groups, including the APA, subspecialty organizations, and educational organizations in psychiatry. Finally, I recognized the importance of building a stronger evidence base for certification and continuing certification.

Since joining the Board, I have been pleased to see substantial progress in each of these areas. More user-friendly approaches to continuing certification, particularly article-based assessments, have been well received. Relationships with stakeholder organizations have strengthened through ongoing dialogue and collaboration. We have also helped build an impressive body of research supporting certification and its role in maintaining professional standards.



What is the most important thing people should understand about the Board?

The most important thing people should understand about the ABPN is that it represents professional self-regulation at its best. The existence of the ABPN and the other ABMS boards reflects the trust that society places in physicians to establish and maintain standards for our own profession.

That trust comes with a significant responsibility. We must build credentialing processes that are rigorous, fair, and credible. If we fail to do so, we risk losing both the public's confidence and the privilege of overseeing our own profession.

What many psychiatrists and neurologists may not realize is that the ABPN is not a separate entity operating apart from the field. The Board, its committees, its examiners, and its leadership are all made up of fellow psychiatrists and neurologists. Everyone involved is also a diplomate who participates in the same certification and continuing certification processes as their colleagues.

Why is the patient perspective important to you, and how does that connect to your work on the Board?

Patients place enormous trust in the institutions that help regulate medicine, often without fully understanding how those systems work. In my experience, many patients do not know the difference between medical licensure and board certification, or that physicians can sometimes practice in a specialty without being Board-certified.

Every patient, including me when I am a patient, wants the best physician possible. However, it can be difficult for patients to know how to identify expertise and professional qualifications. That is one reason board certification matters. It provides an independent assessment that helps patients and the public have confidence in a physician's training and competence.

Keeping the patient perspective in mind helps ensure that our decisions are guided not only by what is important to physicians but also by what best serves the people who depend on us for their care.

Did you have a mentor who affected your career journey?

I have been fortunate to have many outstanding mentors throughout my career. If I had to identify the single most important mentor, however, I would choose my fifth-grade teacher, Miss Eldred. At the time, I was a capable but unremarkable student who had learned how to get good grades with the least possible effort. She saw through that immediately and refused to accept it.

She taught me that the goal is not simply to earn a grade, receive an award, or impress others. The real reward comes from knowing that you gave your best effort and produced work you can genuinely be proud of.

That lesson has stayed with me throughout my career. Whether I am caring for a patient, writing a paper, developing a clinical program, or working on certification issues, I still find satisfaction in knowing that I have done the best work I am capable of doing.

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