

ABO's new Craniofacial Examination allows craniofacial orthodontists to meet hospitals' board certification requirement

The American Board of Orthodontics (ABO) debuted its Craniofacial Examination during the September 2016 Clinical Examination session, and Dr. Lindsay Schuster was the first craniofacial orthodontist to take this examination.

Dr. Schuster is a full-time faculty member in the Department of Plastic Surgery at the Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Medical Center and is director of orthodontic services at the hospital's Cleft-Craniofacial Center. She is also faculty with the center's cleft/craniofacial orthodontic fellowship program.

When Dr. Schuster was in dental school at the University of Connecticut, she had her first contact with a craniofacial patient during a pediatric rotation. That experience stayed with her as she continued her education. After completing her orthodontic residency and master's degree at the University of Minnesota, she entered private orthodontic practice for several years before pursuing fellowship training in cleft/craniofacial orthodontics at the New York University Langone Medical Center/Institute of Reconstructive Plastic Surgery. She completed the fellowship in 2011.

For Dr. Schuster, the new Craniofacial Examination met a significant need. Since she works in a hospital setting, she had to meet the institution's expectation that she would become board certified within a five-year time frame. After reviewing the case categories of the ABO's traditional Initial Certification Examination, she realized it would be difficult to present the appropriate cases due to her specialized practice. Thus, Dr. Schuster was among the orthodontists who requested the ABO create a Clinical Examination that would take into account the unique cases craniofacial orthodontists treat.

"I am very grateful to the ABO," said Dr. Schuster, who completed the examination in time to meet the hospital's requirements. "I can imagine it was a lot of work to get this new exam finalized."

The new examination "opened up a lot of options," she said. "I felt like I could show some of my harder cases."

While she found the preparation for the examination to be time-consuming, she thought it was good for her practice as it made her examine office systems and aspects of care beyond the clinical orthodontic result. "From a practice and office protocol perspective, it was a positive," she said.

Meanwhile, the ABO directors are pleased to have met the challenge of creating a new examination.

“I was ecstatic that the ABO conducted the first certification examination for these very special orthodontists,” said Dr. Eladio DeLeon Jr., one of the ABO directors, and immediate past president, who worked on the development of this examination. “These orthodontists who dedicate a majority of professional time caring for the unique challenges of patients with craniofacial anomalies did not have a mechanism for achieving board certification. The ABO’s challenge was to determine how to assess craniofacial treatment since craniofacial orthodontic treatment involves various stages, including pre-surgical infant orthopedics for the cleft patient, Phase I treatment in preparation for alveolar bone grafting, and Phase II comprehensive orthodontic treatment, including orthognathic surgical planning and preparation. After years of discussion, the ABO developed a protocol that allows the craniofacial orthodontist to be assessed in the management of these various phases of treatment.

“As a result of the ABO’s efforts, our craniofacial orthodontic colleagues now have a mechanism to achieve their board certification, which is usually required by hospitals to be a member of the multispecialty craniofacial team.”

ABO Director Dr. Valmy Kulbersh, who also helped develop the Craniofacial Examination, agrees the first examination was a success. “This was just a great accomplishment,” she said. “All our changes in recent years have been to make the exam more inclusive.”

Going forward, the ABO will conduct an ongoing assessment to fine-tune the examination process. The ABO will also continue to reinforce the pool of ABO examiners with expertise in the field of craniofacial treatment.

Details on the Craniofacial Examination requirements can be found [here](#). [Registration](#) is open for the September 2017 and February 2018 examinations.