

# American Board Of Health Physics

April 1978

Dear Colleague:

Periodically over the years of its existence, the American Board of Health Physics has given serious consideration to providing certification in specialty areas. In the past, the Board has decided against specialty certification for various reasons:

- a. The specialty certification required was in an area which was in the fringe area between health physics and other technical specialties and the Board felt that other credentialing groups were better suited to handle specialties involved.
- b. Difficulty in preparing, giving and grading different examinations for different groups.
- c. Concern for deleteriously affecting the meaning of the present Board Certification.
- d. Cost.

For the past three meetings of the Board, the need for again considering a specialty certification has come before the Board for consideration. The Board is giving serious thought to providing specialty certification in areas where it sees a need for such credentials. The Board would like to share with all existing Certified Health Physicists the thoughts it is considering and to solicit comments from each of you to assist the Board in reaching a decision.

First, the Board must keep in mind that the purpose of its existence is to review the credentials of persons working in the area of health physics, and to formally acknowledge those people who have achieved a level of ability which is recognized by peers in the field as being at a high professional level.

Second, the Board must not take any action which would have a deleterious effect on existing Certified Health Physicists.

As health physics has matured as a scientific career, the discipline area covered has widened and the amount and depth of material in the many sub-areas of the profession has increased significantly. In many ways, the profession of health physics can be compared to the professions of medicine and engineering. As the years have passed during the growth of each of these professions, individual members have tended to become very expert in narrower portions of the overall profession. This occurs because it becomes humanly impossible to keep up with all the information and developments occurring in the overall profession. Certainly, we all recognize that in the recent years of our careers as health physicists many developments in other areas of health physics are occurring without our being knowledgeable about any more than the generalities involved. The medical and engineering professions have recognized this problem in earlier years of their growth, and have met the problem by providing for recognition of expertise in sub-categories of their professions. The question before the Board is "Is the health physics profession at a similar point in its growth?"

Even if specialty certification is decided upon, the Board plans to continue to offer the present certification test and program. The present certification will continue to recognize the professional with broad, general knowledge in many areas of health physics. The specialty certification will be designed to recognize a professional who has detailed knowledge in fewer areas of health physics but who has in-depth knowledge in a specified area. It is intended that any specialty certification will require knowledge of all basic health physics fundamentals. The Board would hope that if specialty certification becomes available in a given area, that presently certified health physicists who work in that area would seek the specialty certification. Similarly, the Board hopes that as persons with only specialty certification widen their areas of knowledge, they will seek the general certification indicating expertise in many (but unspecified) areas.

Because of the sheer logistics, volunteer effort and cost of starting specialty certifications in many areas of health physics at one time, the Board tends to feel that if specialty certification is offered, it should be offered only as a genuine need is recognized in a given area.

The power reactor health physics area is the area presently being given consideration for specialty certification. The Board feels there is a potential need for specialty certification in power reactor health physics because:

- a. This specialty of health physics represents a significant number of individuals occupying professional positions. Presently, there are about 50 Radiation Protection Managers (RPM) at power plants and approximately 125 additional people in professional health physics positions within the utility industry. In addition, there are significant numbers of people in architectural-engineering firms, consulting firms and regulatory groups who are involved full time in power reactor health physics.

- b. Since the number of nuclear power plants is expected to increase significantly, the number of professionals needed in this area will also increase. Paul Ziemer in a study of future personnel needs (Health Physics Society Newsletter, March 1976) predicts that 274 health physics professionals will be needed in the power reactor area by 1980, and 784 by 1990.
- c. There are a limited number of individuals having the special qualifications required for these professional positions. As the needs increase, it will become more important for people to be able to demonstrate their capability (or lack of it) in this area.
- d. The importance of power reactors as a source of radiation exposure is evidenced by the trend of increasing man-rem per reactor. The need for competent people to help direct the minimization of exposure from this growing source is apparent.
- e. The public has shown less than complete confidence in the radiation safety of the nuclear power industry. It is important that persons dealing with the public be knowledgeable and be (or have access to) recognized professionals to help gain the confidence of the public.
- f. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has indicated that it is considering the question of requiring further documentation of capability for filling Radiation Protection Manager (RPM) positions.
- g. While the comprehensive knowledge expected of a present Certified Health Physicist is desirable, it is not required for adequate functioning as an RPM in a nuclear power plant.
- h. A Certified Health Physicist does not necessarily have the special qualifications and knowledge required by a nuclear power plant RPM without receiving further training and experience. (Thus, the statement on "Professional Responsibilities of Certified Health Physicists" specifies that "The Certified Health Physicist shall represent himself as an authority in only those areas in which he is considered expert by his peers.").
- i. Requiring all RPMs to be certified under the present Board program and also have training and experience in nuclear power plant health physics is unrealistic in view of the current and expected near-term availability of such personnel.

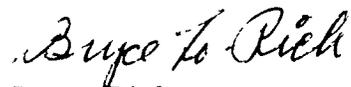
If the Board decides to offer specialty certification in the area of power reactor health physics, the Board envisions creating a Power Reactor Specialty Panel of Examiners to determine and evaluate the credentials of potential candidates. Health physicists from power reactors are expected to be well represented on this Panel.

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The question before the Board, and before you, is that, taking all the information presented in this letter into consideration, should the Board proceed with development of a specialty certification in the area of Power Reactor Health Physics? Please give the Board the benefit of your ideas and opinions to help it decide its professional responsibilities in this area. Since the Board plans discussion of this important item at its June 1978 meeting in Minneapolis, it is important that your ideas and suggestions reach me by early June so that they can be organized before the meeting.

Sincerely,



Bryce Rich  
Chairman

American Board of Health Physics