

American Board of Pathology

Longitudinal Assessment Powered by CertLink

How ABPath CertLink Helps Me Stay Current

— Katie O'Reilly, MD

The American Board of Pathology (ABPath) piloted the CertLink® program right after I sat for my first 10-year continuing certification examination and so I was able to compare the two approaches in real time.

The exam required finding large portions of uninterrupted time to study in preparation and then taking days off work to sit for the exam. For many, it required additional time away and expense for traveling to a testing site. Taking this exam created a burden on young professionals, like me, who are just starting out in practice, not to mention the additional expenses incurred for babysitting, preparation materials, and the examination itself. I found the knowledge gained was often short-lived and temporary.

In contrast, with ABPath CertLink I receive a selection of periodic questions with immediate feedback. The feedback that comes with each answer includes references from the current literature, helping me stay up to date in the rapidly changing areas of medicine. I have routinely pulled references from ABPath CertLink answers to discuss them with colleagues as well as cited them in some of my pathology reports. For example, there was a question about antinuclear antibody (ANA) pattern interpretation that included a reference to the ANA Patterns website that I have shared multiple times with specialist clinicians and other pathologists to aid in the proper interpretation of these tests. This is a well-recognized international standard group that I had not been previously aware of until participating in ABPath CertLink.

Valuable Features



Customizable
assessment



Concentration area
questions



Immediate, focused
feedback



Performance
dashboard

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Although some of the questions are chosen based on a combination of expected core competencies as determined by ABPath, there is a percentage that I am able to customize according to my day-to-day practice, increasing their relevance to my specific practice. Additionally, the feedback provided is so detailed that it shows me my scoring in different areas and helps me to tailor my continuing education according to identified areas needing improvement. Each quarter, I can update the areas of focus to help work on an area identified as needing improvement or to better reflect my area of practice. When I became a laboratory director, I selected administration/laboratory management questions for a few cycle periods to help refresh my knowledge in this area.

Assessing my knowledge using this platform has improved the patient care and expertise I provide as a practicing pathologist. As an example, the questions incorporate the use of emerging immunohistochemical stain panels for various malignancies. I was able to use information from the questions on new stains to advocate for the need to bring select immunohistochemical stains in-house. This has decreased our turnaround times and reduced our send out costs.

ABPath CertLink is also a much more manageable form of assessment given the busy lives of most of us, who at this point, are working full time while balancing family and work demands. I have found ABPath CertLink to be the best way to fulfill the objective of lifelong learning and stay current with best practices and knowledge in my specialty. I now look forward to receiving emails alerting me to new CertLink questions.

In 2022, ABPath began to measure ABPath CertLink participant performance. Diplomates are given annual feedback that they are or are not meeting the longitudinal assessment program's performance standard. In 2025, ABPath will make a summative decision about each diplomate meeting the continuing certification medical knowledge requirement. If a diplomate is not meeting the performance standard, the diplomate will be given a two-year remediation period to improve performance to the required score.

Dr. O'Reilly is board certified in Anatomic and Clinical Pathology and Cytopathology and participates in both the ABPath's Continuing Certification program and the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada's Maintenance of Certification program. She is the Laboratory Medical Director for Peterborough Regional Health Center, Ross Memorial Hospital, Northumberland Hills Hospital, and Campellford Memorial Hospital in Peterborough, Ontario.

