

It's never too late

AAO President-elect Dr. Morris N. Poole completed both the ABO Written Examination and Clinical Examination more than 30 years after his orthodontic residency

Dr. Morris N. Poole, president-elect of the American Association of Orthodontists (AAO), achieved a lifetime goal by successfully completing the American Board of Orthodontics (ABO) Clinical Examination. His experience was not an ordinary one, though. Due to limited funds and family responsibilities, Dr. Poole was not able to take the ABO Written Examination when he graduated from the University of California at Los Angeles in 1978. Three decades later, however, Dr. Poole committed himself to studying for the Written Examination, which he passed in 2009. He continued on to take the Clinical Examination in 2011.

"It was exciting to complete the exam even though it was in the later years of my practice," said Dr. Poole, who practices part time in Logan, UT, with his son, Dr. Morris L. Poole, and Dr. Craig Willis. "It was very worthwhile, and I knew it was something I wanted to complete in my lifetime."

Dr. Poole had long promised his close colleagues Dr. Reed Merrill, an ABO Diplomate, and Dr. Ed Owens Jr., an ABO past president, that he would take the ABO examination. When the ABO began revamping the board-certification process over the last decade, Dr. Poole realized it was time to make good on his promises. He began studying for the Written Examination so he could eventually take the Clinical Examination.

"I soon realized that I had to do a lot to catch up," he said of his Written Examination preparation, which included reading many articles. "I thought it would be daunting, but a lot of information came back to me quickly. It was rather amazing the amount of principles that were still applicable." In fact, he found he still uses many of the principles on a daily basis. The dental materials portion of the examination required the most study because those materials have changed substantially since he was in school, he said. He also found a review of physics to be helpful.

When he was ready to take the Written Examination, he only had to travel a short distance to a testing center. In 1978, the Written Examination was only given during and at the site of the AAO Annual Session. Dr. Poole could not afford to attend the AAO Annual Session in San Francisco, CA, that year as he had recently paid for three state board examinations after graduating from dental school. He is pleased that orthodontic residents no longer face this same obstacle since the Written Examination is now given at exam centers throughout the United States and Canada.

He also appreciates the relatively recent changes to the Clinical Examination. Over the past 10 years, the ABO has standardized the Clinical Examination. "I really learned that the standardization of the evaluation of cases was the greatest thing about this certification. You pull out the sheet, and you know what's successful

about a case you may want to choose for the clinical portion of the exam. You know if your cases are good or not before you go to the exam," he said. In addition, the examiners take steps to ensure they are all reviewing cases in the same way, he said. "I respect the work that Dr. Owens and others did to standardize the examination," Dr. Poole said. "The men and women of the ABO really care about the profession and keeping its standards."

Dr. Poole expects that his son will become board-certified in the near future. Dr. Morris L. Poole had planned to take the Initial Certification Examination after graduating from his residency, but later learned that his residency case models had been photographed and thrown away. Despite this setback, he is now selecting cases from his practice and is working toward taking the Clinical Examination.

"Board certification really says that you have met a standard," Dr. Poole said. "In this day and age, we have competition from all areas of dentistry. As a practitioner, the standard you set is so important. Part of that is becoming board-certified."

Dr. Poole will be in his 70s when his certification expires. While he hopes to be retired at that point, he said he will renew his certification if he is still practicing.

"Recertifying every 10 years makes one continually look at what one is doing," he said. "You are committed to what you are doing. Recertification really says that you are keeping up with the standards."

Those standards bring rewards. For Dr. Poole, his reward is the return of former patients who bring in their children. "It really says that what you did was worth the time and effort, and they, the patients, love it," he said.