

## Alabama State Board of Medical Examiners



In 1818, a year after the Alabama Territory was created and a year before the territory became the 22<sup>nd</sup> state, the Territorial Assembly of Alabama was unsuccessfully petitioned to establish a board of physicians to examine and license applicants to practice medicine. In 1823, the state's first Medical Practice Act was passed, providing for medical boards in five leading communities in the state. However, it contained numerous exemptions. Everyone practicing before 1823 was exempted from examination, as was anyone who had practiced for two years in another state or who had graduated from a "regular medical school." An amendment passed in 1832 exempted practitioners of the "botanical system of [Dr. Samuel Thomson](#)" provided they did not "bleed, apply a blister of Spanish flies, administer calomel ... opium or laudanum."

The 1877 Medical Practice Act set aside the local examining boards and established the Medical Association of the State of Alabama as the body responsible for setting the standards and qualifications required of persons desiring to practice medicine in the state. In 1907, the Medical Practice Act was amended to require all examinations for certification to be held in Montgomery, Ala. The Board of Censors of the State Medical Association, which served as the State Health Department, also served as the State Board of Medical Examiners.

In 1959, a law was passed creating the Board of Healing Arts and requiring a basic science examination for medical and chiropractic application. The Board of Healing Arts certified qualification to applicants' individual licensing boards. In 1963, the duties of the Board of Medical Examiners were removed from the Board of Health and rested as a separate board. In 1981, the Board of Healing Arts was abolished and the Alabama Medical Licensure Commission created.

Currently comprised of 15 physicians, the [Alabama Board of Medical Examiners](#) serves as the investigative and prosecutorial body and is responsible for all administrative functions. The Medical Licensure Commission, which is comprised of seven physician members and one public member, serves as judge and jury before whom the board seeks punitive action. The commission issues medical licenses upon receipt of a Certificate of Qualification from the board. Today, the board has 31 full-time employees working to meet the requirements of the Medical Practice Act, up from just two in 1963.

In the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the American Medical Association (AMA) used the Medical Association of the State of Alabama's model when it reorganized, calling it "the best medical association in the world." Alabama physicians, William O. Baldwin, M.D., J. Marion Sims, M.D., and William C. Gorgas, M.D. served as AMA president in 1868-69, 1876-77 and 1901-10, respectively. Gorgas also served as U.S. Surgeon General as did Alabamians Luther Terry, M.D., and David Satcher, M.D. The current U.S. Surgeon General, [Regina Benjamin, M.D.](#), also hails from Alabama.

Among the other notable leaders in the Alabama medical regulatory community are Jerome Cochran, M.D., commonly call the "Father of Alabama Public Health" who served as the first state public health officer from 1879 until his death in 1896; Ira Myers, M.D., who served as Alabama State Health Officer from 1962 to 1986 and is credited with implementing extensive immunization programs that helped eliminate polio, neonatal tetanus and diphtheria; and Leon C. Hamrick, M.D., who served as the Chairman of the Board of Censures, Chairman of the State Committee of Public Health, and Chairman of the Medical Licensure Commission.

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Alabama has also seen five board members elected to serve as president or chair of the FSMB including: [Samuel Welch, M.D.](#) (1926-7), [J.N. Baker, M.D.](#) (1936-7), [Kenneth C. Yohn, M.D.](#)

(1990-1), [James E. West, M.D.](#) (1996-7), and [Regina M. Benjamin, M.D.](#) (2008-9). In addition, [J. Daniel Gifford, M.D.](#), currently serves on the FSMB Board of Directors as a Director-at-Large.