Virginia Board of Medicine

 The earliest law to regulate the medical profession in any of the original 13 colonies was enacted in Virginia in 1639. This legislative act called for regulation of physician fees and resulted from the belief of planters that they were being overcharged for the treatment of their slaves.

Nearly 100 years later, in 1736, the Virginia Assembly passed "An act regulating fees and accounts of practitioners of physic…" This act provided for a definite fee schedule that distinguished between those who had received training through apprenticeships and others "who have studied physic in any universities and taken a degree therein…" Those with university degrees were allowed to charge higher fees.

On Jan. 31, 1884, the Virginia Assembly adopted the state's first Medical Practice Act to "regulate the practice of medicine and surgery…" in the Commonwealth. The act created a board of medical examiners, the predecessor to the Virginia Board of Medicine, with representation from each Congressional District and from the state at large.

At the first examinations administered by the board on April 8, 1885, eight subcommittees of four members each conducted the examinations. There were 25 applicants, well outnumbered by 32 examiners, and 19 applicants passed. Of the six who failed to qualify, two openly defied the new law and began the practice of medicine. Both were indicted, taken to court, tried and convicted of the unlawful practice of medicine.

Nearly 30 years later, podiatry, osteopathy and chiropractic were added to the board, establishing a composite Board of Medicine. Other allied professions were added subsequently, beginning with physical therapy in 1958. In 1968, Virginia was among the first seven states to administer the Federation Licensing Examination (FLEX).

In the fall of 1979, the board moved its offices from Portsmouth, Va. to Richmond, Va. and joined other boards under the Department of Regulatory Boards. The name of the department was changed to the Department of Health Professions, a name that was suggested by former board member, Edward Calvert, M.D.

Leaders of note for the Virginia Board of Medicine include George Carroll, M.D., who served as the board's secretary-treasurer from 1971 to 1986, and Hillary H. Connor, M.D., who served as the board's first physician executive director from 1987 to 1994. In addition, Virginia board member Gerald J. Bechamps, M.D., served as FSMB chair from 1994 to 1995.