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Board Preparation: Take and Pass the Boards the First Time

You will soon be taking your boards. If you're worrying about passing the boards, relax. The American Board of Emergency Medicine (ABEM) reported that, in 2011, the pass rates for first-time takers of the qualifying and oral boards were 91% and 97%, respectively. Have faith that your residency program, frequent test-taking and continual studying are preparing you well for the ABEM boards. While many differ on study strategies, all agree that post-residency graduation preparation is key to passing the boards the first time.

Preparation for ABEM Candidates

Qualifying exam dates are November 17-22, 2014. The certification application cycle begins April 15, and online registration will be open from May 1 – November 1, 2014, without a late fee. The [ABEM Web site](#) is a great resource for information on [exam dates](#), due dates for paperwork and payment, and contact information. You can also download "[The Model of the Clinical Practice of Emergency Medicine \(EM Model\)](#)" from this site. It outlines all subjects covered on ABEM exams. ABEM will soon be imposing new requirements for graduates who delay their applications beyond one year, so apply at your earliest opportunity.

When trying to decide what to study, there are many options, including review books, review courses, and question banks. In 2006, EMRA surveyed recent emergency medicine residency graduates on their preferred methods to prepare for written and oral board exams. A summary of this survey, "[Preparing for the Boards: Board Review Task Force Report](#)", was published in the August/September 2006 *EM Resident* and is an incredibly valuable resource. Here are a few updates and suggestions:

- ACEP's [PEER VIII](#) is the gold standard for content review and self-assessment. It has 450 board-style questions from all

"EM Model" categories, along with detailed answer explanations based on several key EM textbooks and journal articles. *PEER VIII* is available for multiple devices. You can pick your *PEER* based on the version you like best—the print edition, online edition, for iPhone or coming soon, *PEER VIII* for iPad® the print and online editions are available from the ACEP Bookstore, with discounted prices for ACEP members. The iPhone version can be purchased on the App Store

- Other board prep materials are available in the "[Study and Certification](#)" section of the ACEP Bookstore online.
- Popular review courses for the written boards include the 4-day [National Emergency Medicine Board Review](#) course, which is held throughout the year at various venues, and the Ohio ACEP chapter's 3 - 5-day [Emergency Medicine Review Course](#), held in Columbus.
- Popular review courses for the oral boards include ICEP's [oral board review course](#) (held at the hotel used for the actual boards) and Pennsylvania ACEP's [oral board simulation course](#).
- Many [ACEP state chapters](#) provide review courses that were not mentioned but are very good as well. Consider checking with your state chapter first for a listing of local and regional review courses they may suggest.
- The link for ACEP's master calendar is <http://webapps.acep.org/MasterCalendar/MasterCalendar.aspx>
- AAEM also offers both an [Oral Board Review](#) and [Written Board Review](#) course.

Some candidates prefer practice questions that narrow the list of subjects for review and bolster test-taking confidence and skills. Others prefer comprehensive review books to organize and reinforce their knowledge, while others favor the stimulation of lecturers and the classroom atmosphere of review courses. Many use a combination of these approaches. Choose whatever makes you most comfortable and teaches you the most in the shortest period of time.

After You Are a Diplomate: ABEM Maintenance of Certification (MOC)

ABEM's recertification process changed; the word "recertification" is no longer used – it's "maintenance of certification" instead. Rather than a written or oral board exam every 10 years, ABEM and the other members of the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) now require more frequent assessment. As of 2004, the MOC program consists of four components: Professional Standing, Lifelong Learning and Self Assessment (LLSA), Assessment of Cognitive Expertise (the Continuous Certification, or "ConCert™," exam), and Assessment of Practice Performance (APP). Professional standing requires candidates to maintain each of a diplomate's licenses during the entire period of time in which the diplomate maintains or attempts to regain certification. Each diplomate must also earn at least 25 hours of AMA Category I CME per year to satisfy MOC. APP requires the diplomate to complete one practice improvement and one patient feedback activity every 5 years to meet MOC requirements.

The [LLSA tests](#) and the [ConCert™ exam](#) are the testing components of the MOC process. The [LLSA](#) process consists of articles selected from the emergency medicine literature and a corresponding online, open-book test for each year. Starting in 2013, as one of their MOC requirements, diplomates must pass four LLSA tests every 5 years. The ConCert™ exam is a half-day examination; a few years ago, ABEM removed the required link between previous LLSA readings and the development of the ConCert™ examination. ABEM states that "each of the ConCert™ examinations will be developed without a necessary reliance on the identified LLSA readings. Similar to any EM content, however, information in the LLSA readings that is important to the practice of EM remains viable for testing."

Reading the LLSA articles is crucial to your success – both in passing the annual LLSA tests and staying current with changes in emergency medicine. To help you do this, ACEP developed the [LLSA Resource Center](#), an online "gateway" to lots of information about LLSA. ACEP members now have instant access to almost all of the LLSA articles at no extra charge simply by logging on to the ACEP site. It also includes the handouts and audio from the LLSA lectures at *Scientific Assembly* and the article summaries published in [Critical Decisions in Emergency Medicine](#).

Another valuable study tool is [EM:Prep](#), developed by ACEP and the Center for Medical Education (CME). The Center is the same CME provider that publishes *Emergency Medical Abstracts*. *EM:Prep*, provides summary reviews of the LLSA articles and CME credit.

Many ACEP chapters are including LLSA article review at their board review courses or provide standalone LLSA review courses. These courses can be found on the [Master Calendar of EM](#) under the meeting type "Board preparation."

Details of each component are available at [ABEM's website under the MOC headings](#).

The AOBEM Boards

The American Osteopathic Board of Emergency Medicine's (AOBEM) oral and written boards are similar to ABEM boards, and the same study principles apply. The exception is that the AOBEM boards have separate ECG and radiology interpretation subtests. After passing the oral and written boards and completing a year of practice, there is a third examination required for AOBEM boards. This examination consists primarily of proof of practice, including chart submission, proof of recent CME, licensure, and privileges. AOBEM's continuous certification program is also very similar to ABEM's. The main exception is that the LLSA equivalent, called the Continuous Osteopathic Learning Assessment (COLA), will be based on core content modules with suggested readings. See [AOBEM's web site](#) for further details on both certification and recertification requirements.

Best of luck with the boards; we hope this information smoothes the process and helps you achieve your goals.

Next month... Be an Advocate: Get Involved and Make a Difference for You, Your Colleagues, and Your Patients.

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