Learning Objectives

1. Manage anxiety in the anticipation of an important examination.
2. Develop an individual plan of study for the certification/recertification examination in Family Medicine.
3. Demonstrate specific test-taking techniques.
4. Explain the examination process for certification/recertification in Family Medicine.
THE EXAM
Recertification Examination

ABFM

– Exam Format

• All multiple choice – 4 answer
  – Stem and options (A, B, C, D)
• Five Sections
• Three general portions
  – Section 1 – 120 Multiple Choice Questions (120 minutes)
  – Section 4 – 80 multiple choice questions (95 minutes)
  – Section 5 – 80 multiple choice questions (95 minutes)
• Two module choices
  – Selected on exam day during the exam
  – 45 questions each (45 minutes/module)
A 38-year-old female sees you for a routine evaluation. She asks you what strategies you would recommend to help her improve her overall health. She says she usually has coffee and a couple of doughnuts for breakfast, and usually eats lunch and dinner at fast food restaurants. Her only activity consists of a few household chores performed for a couple of hours on the weekend. She has gained approximately 15 kg (33 lb) over the past 10 years.

Which one of the following would be the best recommendation?

- A. Increasing her intake of saturated fat
- B. Increasing her intake of caffeine
- C. Decreasing her level of physical activity
- D. Improving her diet and exercising more
(Re)Certification Examination

• ABFM
  – Exam Format
    • All multiple choice – 4 or 5 answers
      – Stem and options (A, B, C, D)
    • Two general portions
    • Two module choices
      – Selected on exam day during the exam
  – Exam tutorial
    • [www.theabfm.org](http://www.theabfm.org)
    • Preview of the look and feel of a computerized examination
Exam Tutorial

- Go to https://www.theabfm.org/moc/examtutorials.aspx
- Click ABFM Exam Tutorial, click Start, and the tutorial will begin.
Exam Preparation Guidance

- 6 videos from the ABFM’s psychometrician
- [https://www.theabfm.org/moc/exampreparation.aspx](https://www.theabfm.org/moc/exampreparation.aspx)
Computerized Testing

• Testing is proctored by Prometric
• https://www.prometric.com/en-us/clients/abfm/Pages/landing.aspx
Scoring

• No penalty for incorrect answers
  • Leave no question unanswered
  • Guess if you don’t know

• Setting a passing score
  – Angoff Method – using a group of peers to estimate the percentage of family physicians who would answer each question correctly
Passing Threshold – Angoff Technique

Setting the Passing Threshold
A set of more than two dozen ABFM diplomates individually rates the difficulty of each item to set a minimum passing score, using a process called the Angoff technique. This group of volunteer physicians are randomly selected from all those recent diplomates that performed well on their last examination. Ultimately, the exam’s passing threshold is a standard set by your peers in family medicine. Because of the sampling procedure, the makeup of this group is similar to the overall group of family physician diplomates. The rating process they perform involves estimating the percentage of marginally certifiably knowledgeable candidates who would correctly answer each particular question. This committee may also comment on and critique certain questions, particularly those in which relevance to Family Medicine may be debated. The minimum passing score established by this group, its practical impact on passing percentage, and the procedures for its establishment are later reviewed and approved by the ABFM examination committee.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Recerts</th>
<th>Certs</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>330/380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>380</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Manage Your Stress
Preparing Yourself Prior to the Examination
### Summary

**Steps to Creating an Effective Study Plan**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Know what material is going to be on the exam in what proportions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2    | Identify your level of need for study  
• How you performed on last standardized ABFM exam  
• Whether you practice broad-based family medicine |
| 3    | Identify how many hours you will need, would like, or will be able to study (Consider a minimum 3-month lead time – if seeking serious score improvement [> 100 points, or if you are retaking the examination]) |
| 4    | Evaluate how the designated amount of study will fit into your weekly schedule |
| 5    | Identify and obtain the materials you plan to use |
| 6    | Focus on relevant material with which you are least comfortable and familiar |
| 7    | Divide up the material into your schedule as specifically as is reasonable |

Adapted from The ABFM.org
## 1. ABFM (Re)Certification Examination Content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cardiovascular</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endocrine</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gastrointestinal</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heme/Immune</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integumentary</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musculoskeletal</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nephrologic</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neurologic</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonspecific</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychogenic</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reprod – Female</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reprod – Male</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respiratory</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Sensory</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population-based Care</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epidemiology, EBM, prevention, health policy &amp; legal issues, bioterror, quality improvement, geographic/urban/rural issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patient-based Systems</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinical decision-making, communication and doctor-patient interaction, family &amp; cultural issues, ethics, palliative care, end-of-life care</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 1*</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 2*</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Know what material is going to be on the exam
Exam Modules*

*(Description: Page 15 of CIB)*

- Ambulatory Family Medicine
- Child and Adolescent Care
- Geriatrics
- Women’s Health
- Maternity Care
- Emergent/Urgent Care
- Hospital Medicine
- Sports Medicine
2. Identify your level of need for study

- Broad population of practice
  - Studying is most likely to be effective (memorable) if you keep specific clinical practice cases in mind while studying material that applies to those cases
  - Referring back to an article or study resource after seeing a complex patient aids retention

- Narrowly defined population of practice
  - Systematic approach to reviewing the spectrum
  - Medical knowledge fades without periodic re-exposure
  - Include those areas not included in practice any longer, as well as common entities seen every day
3. Identify how many hours you will need, would like, or will be able to study

- Be realistic
- Talk with coworkers, friends, and family
4. Evaluate how the designated amount of study will fit into your weekly schedule

- Schedule your study time – on your calendar
- Daily time
  - Key ingredient in exam success is scheduling regular time to study
- Minimize long periods of study just on weekends
5. Identify and obtain the materials needed

- Nearly any high-quality, comprehensive study material can be used effectively
“Your” Study Materials

• Board Review Express syllabus
• USPSTF A-Z
  – http://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/uspsttopics.htm
• ABFM Self-Assessment Modules
• AFP by Topic
  – http://www.aafp.org/afp/topicModules/viewAll.htm
Short-Term Study Tips

• Gaining points involves studying medical information – and there is a strong dose-response relationship
• Use the in-training exams as a pre- and posttest
• [www.aafp.org/boardreview/questions](http://www.aafp.org/boardreview/questions) [https://www.theabfm.org/residency/ite.aspx](https://www.theabfm.org/residency/ite.aspx)
Pre- and Posttest

• Mark your starting point prior to studying and then to see if your study schedule is effective
• Try to take it according to the standardized timing and instructions
• Promotes focus on study
  – Allows one to actually SEE improvement
Using the in-training exams for pre- and posttests – an example.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Exam Questions</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday following course</td>
<td>201_ In-training examination Questions 1-30</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Pretest)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One week later</td>
<td>201_ In-training examination Questions 31-60</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Posttest 1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One week later</td>
<td>201_ In-training examination Questions 61-90</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Posttest 2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

✓ Goal is a minimum of 70% correct?
6. Focus on the **relevant** material with which you are **least** comfortable and familiar

- Focus on established medicine
- Answer the question using THE MOST CURRENT information
- 9-month development cycle for the examinations, so brand new information, no matter how reliable, is unlikely to appear as an item
7. Divide up the study material into your schedule, as specifically as is reasonable

- Lectures(??)/Number of days until exam = number of lectures reviewed each day
  - Schedule regular time to study
  - Start with those content areas that you find more challenging
  - Serious score improvement needs 10-14 hours of study time per week (100 points)
  - Keep a “fact sheet” for last-minute review
  - Doing a lot of review questions is secondary (30 points)
    - [www.aafp.org/boardreview/questions](http://www.aafp.org/boardreview/questions)
    - [https://www.theabfm.org](https://www.theabfm.org)
# Using the In-training Exams for Pre- and Posttests and “Additional Questions”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Exam Questions</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday following course (Pretest)</td>
<td>201_ In-training examination Questions 1-30</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday following course (Studied for 50 minutes; 10 minutes “remain.”) Time for 5 questions</td>
<td>201_ In-training examination Questions 31-36</td>
<td>5 minutes for questions then 5 minutes to review annotated answers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday following course (Studied for 40 minutes; 20 minutes “remain.”) Time for 10 questions</td>
<td>201_ In-training examination Questions 37-47</td>
<td>10 minutes for questions then 10 minutes to review annotated answers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One week later (Monday) (First posttest)</td>
<td>201_ In-training examination Questions 48-78</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Proceed with Studying, Taking Weekly Inventory of Progress

• Reevaluate at end of first week. If schedule is not as accommodating as you anticipated, consider changes to your schedule OR the ambitiousness of your study plan

• Consider using In-Training Exam items before beginning and after a month to see if performance seems to be improving
How can we improve our response strategy in translating our knowledge into the exam’s response format?
ABFM Tips for Test-Taking

• Read the stem carefully
• Read every response option (cross out the wrong ones)
• Consider the tables and images carefully
• Answer only after considering all options
• If you do not know – guess!
• Go with the first thoughtful answer, unless you realize that you actually made a mistake
ABFM Tips for Test-Taking

• Attempt to determine whether general knowledge or patient-specific knowledge is being assessed.
• DO NOT try to out-guess the item number.
• Don’t read the answers first and try to find it in the questions. Knowledge is TOO vast.
• Carefully manage exam time.
• ALWAYS answer all items before exiting exam.
TIP

• Both questions and answers have catch words; look carefully for them
  – “except”
  – “least likely”
  – “most likely”
  – “all but”
  – “never”
  – “always”
  – “all”
“Catch Words”

Six-year-old Hillary DeLong is brought to the emergency room by her mother. Half an hour ago she was bitten on her right arm by a neighbor’s dog. The recommended first step in emergency treatment is to:

A. Thoroughly cleanse the area with soap and water
B. Report the accident to the police
C. Encourage free bleeding
D. Cauterize the wound and suture it
TIP

- Avoid unfamiliar choices
- These are made up by good test writers
“Unfamiliar Choices”

A pregnant woman at term with a 4-cm dilated cervix is found to have marginal placenta previa with mild bleeding. The appropriate management is:

A. Cesarean section
B. Rupture of the membrane
C. Internal podalic version
D. Use of Willett’s scalp traction forceps
TIP

• Analyze similar answers carefully
• If one merely restates the other, both are wrong
• If one is the opposite of the other, one is correct
• If answers look similar, but have different numbers, one is correct
“Similar Answers”

The most appropriate treatment for erythrocytosis associated with polycythemia vera and a hemoglobin of 18.5 g/dL is:

A. Chlorambucil
B. Phlebotomy to maintain hemoglobin at 14 g/dL in men and 12 g/dL in women
C. Phlebotomy to maintain hemoglobin at 16 g/dL in men and 14 g/dL in women
D. Radioactive phosphorus ($^{32}$P)
The most appropriate treatment for erythrocytosis associated with polycythemia vera and a hemoglobin of 18.5 g/dL is:

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C. Phlebotomy to maintain hemoglobin at 16 g/dL in men and 14 g/dL in women
D. Radioactive phosphorus (³²P)

“If answers look similar, but have different numbers, one is correct”
A 55-year-old woman has had pain and swelling of her left calf for 4 days while driving across the country. Physical examination shows slight swelling and tenderness of the left calf, but no other signs of deep venous thrombosis. She reports anaphylaxis after a previous injection of dye for intravenous pyelography. To promptly confirm the suspected deep venous thrombosis of the calf vein, you would now order:

A. Impedance plethysmography
B. Doppler ultrasound
C. Radionuclide venography using 99m Tc macroaggregated albumin
D. Radionuclide venography using 99m Tc-labeled erythrocytes
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C. Radionuclide venography using 99m Tc macroaggregated albumin
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“If one merely restates the other, both are wrong”
TIP

• For answers with numbers or percentages
  – Pick mid-range levels
  – Pick values that look like the others
“Numbers or Percentages”

Implantation of the fertilized ovum usually occurs:

A. 2 to 3 days following ovulation
B. 6 to 7 days following ovulation
C. 10 to 12 days following ovulation
D. Exactly 14 days following ovulation
“Numbers or Percentages”

Implantation of the fertilized ovum usually occurs:

A. 2 to 3 days following ovulation
B. 6 to 7 days following ovulation
C. 10 to 12 days following ovulation
D. Exactly 14 days following ovulation
“Numbers or Percentages”

At the end of 28 weeks of gestation (7 lunar months), the fetus weighs (in grams):

A. 15
B. 600
C. 1000
D. 1800
At the end of 28 weeks of gestation (7 lunar months), the fetus weighs (in grams):

A. 15
B. 600
C. 1000
D. 1800
TIP

• Choose answers that are consistent with good family medicine values…
“Values”

Three times in the past month, a 32-year-old woman has arrived unexpectedly for consultation after hours at her family physician’s office. She has also complained about the arrogance of the receptionist. The next time she arrives to see the doctor when he is working alone in the evening, he should:

A. Tell her family that there is nothing wrong with her and that she should see a psychiatrist
B. Point out that she needs careful, thorough evaluation and give her the next available appointment during scheduled office hours
C. Ask her to call the office the next morning
D. Drive her out of the office
“Values”

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C. Ask her to call the office the next morning

D. Drive her out of the office
“Values”

In your urban family practice office, you encounter a Haitian patient with features of potential “AIDS.” Your best decision is to:

A. Immediately refer the patient to an AIDS clinic
B. Send the patient to a hospital emergency room
C. Provide concerned, comprehensive and continuous care for the patient and the family
D. Politely ask the patient to see the other family physician located on the next street
Values

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The Last Week Before the Exam

• Study Notes/Charts/“Fact Sheet”
• Plan to stop studying 48 hours before the exam
• Drive to the testing site before exam day
• Plan exam day
Plan Your Exam Day

• Food
  – Can put in locker for break

• Clothing
  – Comfort
  – Look good, feel good, score good
  – “Lucky clothing”

• Identification – 1 photo identification (government-issued)
The Exam Begins

- Deep breaths; periodically pause and breathe
- Keep a positive attitude
- Read questions carefully
HOMEWORK – BEFORE Monday

✔ ABFM Website
  ✔ Candidate Information Book
  ✔ Computer Simulation of Examination
  ✔ Test Preparation Videos (if you like)

✔ Set your study time on your calendar
In the End...

Plan to Study
Keep Calm
Be Confident
Summary

- Any high-quality, comprehensive study material can be used effectively.
- The key ingredient in exam success is scheduling regular time to study.
- Gaining points on the exam involves studying medical information, and there is a strong dose-response relationship.
- Use the In-Training Exams as a pre- and posttest.
- Do not try to out-guess the item writers. Rely simply on your knowledge to respond to the selections.
Thank you!
References