SSAT Resident and Fellow Webinar: Preparing for the ABS Certifying Examination

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Background

- American Board of Surgery
  - Certification process
    - Qualifying Exam (QE) = written boards
    - Certifying Exam (CE) = oral boards
    - MOC = maintenance of certification
  - Spring of chief year
    - Application
    - Case logs
  - QE first step, must pass to register for CE
Timeline

• June – graduate general surgery residency

• July – take QE
  – as early as R4

• August – QE results

• September 1st – CE registration deadline
  – Active medical license
  – First come, first served (300 spots per date/location)
  – Miss deadline or choose to defer = lost opportunity
    • 1 chance per academic year
    • 3 chances over 3 years
Dates, Locations, and Fees

- **2017-2018 Dates**
  - Sept. 25-27, 2017 - Philadelphia
  - Oct. 16-18, 2017 - New Orleans
  - Nov. 13-15, 2017 - Chicago
  - Mar. 26-28, 2018 - Philadelphia
  - Apr. 23-25, 2018 - St. Louis

- CE Fee: $1,300

- Dates posted in late spring for upcoming academic year
Registration

• Tentative CE assignment
  – Must be eligible (passed QE)
  – absurgery.org (Exam records page)
  – NO LATER THAN 9/1
  – Not guaranteed, can be changed/canceled

• Register
  – Within 10 days, receive instructions (mail) and link online (check frequently)

• Convert tentative to final assignment
  – Submit online registration form (by deadline listed)
  – Pay fee (credit card, nonrefundable)

• Exam Details
  – Specific date and time at particular location/hotel
  – Posted on website
  – Exam admission card/hotel info mailed 4-6 weeks before exam
Per ABS website:

“… to evaluate a candidate's clinical skills in organizing the diagnostic *evaluation* of common surgical problems and determining appropriate *therapy*. Emphasis is placed on candidates' ability to use their knowledge and training to *safely, effectively and promptly* manage a broad range of clinical problems.”
• Aligned with SCORE curriculum
  – Created by ABS
  – Majority will be “core” topics, some “advanced”

• Technical details of operations
  – MUST be able to describe technical details of all “core” procedures
    • 45 second rule
    • “Unsatisfactory performance” if can’t
  – May ask about non-core cases
How to Prepare

- Review content
  - Surgery textbook (if you previously took notes, review for content)
  - Procedural text (e.g. Mastery of Surgery – helpful for technical steps)
  - SESAP audio (for long commutes)
  - Review books (Safe Answers, How to Win, Neff’s Passing Gen Surg Oral Board, Clinical Scenarios in Surgery, etc.)
  - Society guidelines
    - ACLS/ATLS, EAST, NCCN
  - Review course (Osler, Odyssey, etc.)
How to Prepare

- **PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE**
  - Start during chief year
  - After graduation, ask residency and/or fellowship faculty, classmates
  - In the few weeks leading up to exam date, *practice daily*

- General case outline:
  - Presentation (diagnose quickly – not med student HPI)
  - Workup
  - Management (usually surgical – this IS a surgery exam)
  - Complication or change scenario
    - You WILL have complications even if you do everything perfectly; it is a test of your problem solving and safe management
Tips

• Be confident in your training and preparation

• Stay focused, imagine real life patient at bedside

• Articulate **what** you would do, **how** you would do it, and **WHY**
  – do what you would do, not what you think they want to hear

• Be systematic
  – Crashing patient: ABCs…
  – Hypotension: figure out which type of shock and treat accordingly
  – Don’t be stubborn…. big picture
  – Summary statements if you’re stuck: “OK, we have a 55 y/o F…”

• Do NOT assume anything

• Move on: can't worry about previous case or room

• Check out candidate video to get an idea of the real thing:
Exam Day

- Bring CE admission card and photo ID
- No purses, briefcases, phones
- May bring paper/pen, leave with examiner
- Can have water
- Wear a watch to keep track of time (no “smartwatch” allowed)
Format

• AM or PM session
  – Will know ahead of time
  – AM
    • 7 am briefing
    • 8-9:30 am OR 10-11:30 am
  – PM
    • 12 pm briefing
    • 1-2:30 pm OR 3-4:30 pm
• 3 rooms

• 30 minutes/room (1.5 hrs total)

• 2 examiners/room
  – Senior and associate examiners
  – Alternate cases (2 cases per examiner)
  – Only know your name (speak up if you know your examiner)

• 4 cases per room = **12 cases total**

• Once finished with last room, you’re done!
Exam Grading

• Each examiner independently grades every scenario
  – Don’t get distracted by what they’re writing down, you won’t be able to tell

• Final grade (PASS / FAIL) is based on overall evaluation of all 6 examiners

• ABS states they adjust for variations in examiner grading patterns (too tough or too lenient)
What they are looking for (directly from ABS website):

– Demonstrates an organized approach and solid rationale for planned actions.

– Rapidly determines and interprets key findings in a clinical presentation.

– Effectively and efficiently uses clinical knowledge to solve clinical problems; effectively addresses key management points.

– Avoids errors and critical fails (omission and commission) associated with the case.

– Recognizes personal limitations in knowledge and expertise when diagnosing and treating clinical problems.

– Reacts in a prompt but flexible manner to alterations in the patient's course, e.g., disease or treatment complications.

– Overall, demonstrates appropriate surgical judgment, clinical reasoning skills and problem-solving ability.
Exam Grading

• Final results posted within 7 business days (usually Thur or Fri of same week) on ABS website
  – Email notification
## Pass Rates

### QE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th># Examinees</th>
<th>Pass Rate</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>1,356</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>1,367</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>1,422</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>1,450</td>
<td>80%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>1,449</td>
<td>90%</td>
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### CE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th># Examinees</th>
<th>Pass Rate</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>1,396</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>1,440</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>1,374</td>
<td>77%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>1,419</td>
<td>80%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>1,344</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
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You Passed! Now What?

- Welcome to the club!
  - 63,920 ABS diplomats as of 6/2017

- ABS certificate
  - 6 months in mail

- Update profiles
  - CV
  - Society websites
  - Job search

- MOC
  - CME credits
  - Recertification: new model soon as of 2018
Questions?

GOOD LUCK....
YOU CAN DO THIS!