RESIDENT QUESTIONS
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

1. **When and where is the Qualifying (written) Examination given?** The QE is given over a six-day period in the fall, usually in November. Registered candidates schedule a one-day appointment to take the examination at one of over 200 Pearson VUE computer-based testing centers. Testing center locations can be found on Pearson VUE’s web page, [www.pearsonvue.com/abem/locate](http://www.pearsonvue.com/abem/locate). For more information about the QE, view the QE Information for Candidates pages of the ABEM website.

2. **What is the first-time pass rate for the Qualifying Examination?** Passing rates for residency-eligible, first-time takers has been relatively stable over time, ranging between 89-94% over the past five years.

3. **Why does ABEM require two exams to become certified?** The answer is fairly straightforward. The first exam, the Qualifying Examination (QE), is a multiple choice, single-best answer examination. The exam is designed to measure complex cognitive skills (e.g., diagnostic reasoning) and the breadth and depth of your medical knowledge. After you pass the QE, you are eligible to take the Oral Certification Examination, which tests additional, unique skills not as easily translated into a multiple choice question examination. These skills include data acquisition, problem solving, clinical judgment, interpersonal relations, and management of multiple patients.

4. **What happens if I do not pass the Qualifying Examination (QE) or the Oral Certification Examination (OCE)?** Candidates who do not pass the QE or OCE can retake the exam as long as they remain board eligible. Since failing the QE or the OCE is considered a “delay” in the initial certification process, additional certification requirements are assigned to the candidate. Before registering for an examination, candidates must complete an average of 25 AMA PRA Category 1 Credits™ or equivalent per year, and one LLSA test per year. Details on these requirements are included in the Policy on Board Eligibility.

5. **Why does it take so long to get results back from ABEM examinations?** By policy, ABEM releases scores within 90 days of the last day of an examination administration. Historically, ABEM has release scores sooner than that. The length of time it takes to release scores of ABEM examinations is due to ABEM’s quality-control and psychometric best-practices approach to testing. A detailed list of the process used to score the In-training Examination is available on page 4 of the spring 2015 issue of Special Focus: EM Program Directors. Although scoring other examinations may vary from this example, it provides a basic overview of the multiple steps involved in the process. These iterative steps and redundant checks ensure a fair, valid, and confidential examination for every ABEM candidate.

6. **What preparation does ABEM recommend for the In-training Examination?** The In-training Examination (ITE) is designed to provide an individual resident with an estimate of the likelihood that she or he will pass the Qualifying Examination (QE). In
fact, providing this estimate is the validated purpose of the ITE. The ITE is designed to test complex cognitive skills such as diagnostic processing as well as medical knowledge of the specialty. ABEM defers any recommendations for preparing for the ITE to the program director and faculty at your residency.

7. **What are the best board review courses for preparing for ABEM certification examinations?** By policy, ABEM does not produce or endorse any certification preparation courses or materials in order to avoid any perceived conflict of interest. ABEM has studied how physician prepare for the ConCert™ Examination (Marco CA, et al. Acad Emerg Med 2016;23:191-6). The format of the ConCert™ Examination is similar to that of the Qualifying Examination. Most physicians use written materials designed for test preparation. In the aforementioned study, using written materials was associated with better performance, but ABEM strongly cautions against generalizing these findings to the individual physician. For the Oral Certification Examination (OCE), ABEM recommends that candidates be familiar with the eOral testing format. There is a practice room onsite at the OCE where you can familiarize yourself with the test equipment and eOral format.

ABEM has a few samples of multiple choice questions posted on its website, as well as three sample Oral Examination cases, including videos.

8. **How long after a resident completes training does she/he typically take to obtain certification?** Residents are encouraged to apply for initial certification in their last year of EM residency so they will be eligible to register for the QE administered in the November after they graduate. A resident who passes the QE on the first attempt will be assigned to an OCE the following year. Physicians earn ABEM Diplomate status upon passing the OCE. Following that pattern, EM graduates are able to achieve certification within 10-16 months of their residency graduation.

9. **Can D.O.s (osteopathic physicians) become certified by ABEM?** Yes. Any physician who successfully completes an ACGME-accredited Emergency Medicine residency training program can become certified by ABEM. Some osteopathic physicians currently training in an AOA-approved EM residency program can be certified by ABEM if their program becomes ACGME accredited prior to their successful completion of that residency program; details are provided in the Single Accreditation System FAQs.

10. **Why do the ABEM certification exams cost so much?** Any revenue generated from physician-assessment activities that ABEM receives is used to complete all of its programs, activities, research, test development, subspecialty options, research, and other services. ABEM has no other source of income to support its activities. Fees for ABEM examinations have remain fixed for the past five years, and the cost of LLSA tests and CME activities have held steady for six years.

11. **How is ABEM lobbying for residents or on their behalf?** Unlike other EM organizations, such as AAEM and ACEP, ABEM is not a membership organization. As a 501(c)6 organization, ABEM is limited in its ability to lobby. Nonetheless, ABEM is quite active in promoting the specialty of Emergency Medicine. ABEM has funded a permanent fellowship position at the National Academy of Medicine to strengthen the voice of the emergency physician. ABEM is working to make federal quality reporting requirements easier to submit by supporting the development of the Clinical Emergency Data Registry, which will provide automatic credit for meeting certain
requirements of the ABEM Maintenance of Certification Program. ABEM frequently submits comments to CMS advocating for more reasonable quality reporting requirements. ABEM strongly supports resident education through activities at the Residency Review Committee (RRC) and includes resident organizations in summits conducted by ABEM.

12. **Are ABEM volunteers compensated for their service to ABEM?** No. ABEM relies on physician volunteerism. This includes members of the Board of Directors, oral examiners, examination question writers, task force members, and other diplomates who volunteer their time to assist with short-term projects.

13. **Does ABEM get any funding from test-taking facilities or other groups who benefit financially from the certification process?** No. ABEM’s sole source of income from is the application and examination fees it collects. ABEM does not receive financial remuneration from any vendors it uses to administer its examinations or who provide other services and products to the Board. ABEM also does not receive income from groups that produce preparation courses or materials (see FAQ 3), either for initial certification or recertification. ABEM collects the fees that diplomates pay for CME credit that is available for MOC LLSA tests but 100 percent of those fees go directly to CME-granting organizations (e.g., AAEM and ACEP).

14. **How can residents become more involved with ABEM?** ABEM values the feedback and opinions of EM residents. ABEM maintains a list of residents who are willing to offer feedback and input on projects and publications. Sign up to be on our volunteer list [here](#). Once you have been an ABEM diplomate for five years, additional volunteer opportunities are available, such as becoming an ABEM oral examiner or item (test question) writer.

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