

Certifying Exam

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

Development of the Certifying Exam

1. **Why is ABEM moving to the new Certifying Exam?** ABEM's Becoming Certified Initiative (BCI) gathered extensive input from emergency physicians, healthcare leaders, international experts on physician assessment, and the public about all aspects of the initial certification process. We learned from that feedback that ABEM should create an assessment that is even more relevant to practice and assesses additional competencies the current Oral Exam format cannot (e.g., procedural skills).
[Key Findings](#)
[Stakeholder Feedback](#)
2. **When will the new Certifying Exam start?** In 2026. All physicians seeking ABEM Emergency Medicine certification must pass the Certifying Exam as the final step to becoming certified. If you take and pass the Qualifying (written) Exam in 2025, you will be scheduled for the new Certifying Exam in 2026.
3. **Where will the Certifying Exam take place?** The Certifying Exam will take place at the AIME Center in Raleigh, North Carolina. The AIME Center is a state-of-the-art facility designed for the sole purpose of certification assessment. This professional assessment center was created by the American Board of Anesthesiology for high-stakes assessments for physician board certification. Other medical specialty Boards also use the AIME Center. The AIME Center ensures that candidates receive a consistent and fair exam experience. Additional information about the AIME Center selection can be found [here](#).
4. **Is there a testing center on the West Coast?** There is not an equivalent assessment center available on the West Coast. If a center emerges in the years ahead that may be an option, ABEM will assess that center for future use.
5. **Why can't the Oral Exam remain virtual?** The Certifying Exam is not a relocation of the oral Exam—it's an entirely different assessment. For example, it will assess manual ultrasound and procedural skills that cannot be effectively assessed in a virtual format.
6. **Is there data that supports the need for a second exam after the Qualifying Exam?** Although an assessment of knowledge (i.e., the Qualifying Exam) is important, it is insufficient to determine whether a physician has necessary skill in the competencies that are important for an emergency physician. Data demonstrating that the factors assessed in the Oral Exam are different than those assessed in the written Qualifying Exam can be found in *Gorgas DL, et al. The correlation between performance on the American Board of Emergency Medicine (ABEM) qualifying and oral certifying examinations. Acad Emerg Med 2024 Jan;31(1):91-3. doi: 10.1111/acem.14780.* Moreover, poor performance on the Oral Exam is independently associated with the risk of a severe state medical board disciplinary action ([doi: 10.1002/emp2.13119](#)).
7. **Why isn't successful completion of an EM residency sufficient to serve as proof of a candidate obtaining certain competencies?** Some physicians complete a residency without meeting the target performance standards for a graduating resident in a single Emergency Medicine Milestone (i.e., Level 4 Milestone). ABEM's initial certification process serves to independently verify that a physician has met a national standard.

Certifying Exam Cases

8. **How is the Certifying Exam different?** The written Qualifying Examination focuses on medical knowledge and cognitive skills. The Certifying Exam will test competencies that are not tested on the Qualifying Exam (written) or current Oral Exam. It will assess:
 - ✓ Procedural skills

- ✓ Ultrasound skills
- ✓ Difficult conversations
- ✓ Patient-centered communications
- ✓ Reassessment
- ✓ Managing conflict
- ✓ Clinical decision-making
- ✓ Prioritization

9. **What types of cases will there be?** There are two case types that make up the Certifying Exam: Clinical Care Cases and Communication & Procedural Cases.

Clinical Care Cases are guided scenarios that will be discussion-based to show how you prioritize patient care and interact with various sources of clinical information.

Communication & Procedural Cases will assess procedural skills, complex communication, professionalism, and other technical skills. Scenarios could involve standardized patient actors or procedural equipment.

10. **What is ABEM doing to ensure that the assessment is fair? What are ABEM's testing standards?** ABEM is the only ABMS medical specialty board that is accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA). This means that ABEM had to achieve high standards for assessment development, and as ABEM maintains its NCCA accreditation (of which the new Certifying Exam is a part), ABEM must continue to uphold those standards. The standards for high-stakes testing are contained in the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* published by the American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education.

ABEM's testing standards are also reflected in the foundational basis for its examinations (especially the Certifying Exam), the rigorous development of the examination, the detailed post-hoc analysis (including reliability), the approach to reliability, and the insurance of fairness (including diversity and equity principles).

ABEM reviews its test items for bias by convening a Bias & Fairness Panel twice yearly to ensure that test content does not unfairly disadvantage any group. ABEM has worked extensively with multiple testing experts to find ways to enhance the fairness of its examinations by mitigating bias and disrupting stereotypes. Current Certifying Exam cases in development are undergoing a review to ensure cases are representative of the breadth of content areas commonly found in the specialty and the variety of patients that emergency physicians see on a daily basis.

After any major change to an examination or when the core content (the EM Model) significantly evolves, ABEM conducts a standard-setting study to identify the passing standard (cut-score). This process is followed by every medical specialty board involved in high-stakes testing. For the Oral Exam and for the Certifying Exam, ABEM uses a modified Angoff method. This process occurred when ABEM introduced the eOral format and when ABEM began the virtual oral exam (VOE). ABEM will conduct a standard-setting study for the new Certifying Exam.

11. **How will ABEM evaluate the Certifying Exam?** ABEM conducts rigorous analysis of all ABEM assessments. ABEM has a long history of publishing validity evidence for its assessment processes. Still, there is substantial content validity evidence for the new Certifying Exam. ABEM anticipates publishing content validity evidence and construct validity evidence soon.

ABEM undergoes extensive post-examination analysis after every examination administration. ABEM will continue this detailed analysis with the Certifying Exam. These analyses include a review of the examination configuration that includes days of administration, administrations per day, candidates per morning daily sessions and candidates per afternoon daily sessions, the case mix (number of single cases; number of structured interview cases), the anchor examination administration used to equate the examination, and the use of the scaled scoring.

ABEM determines the scaled examination scores by the examination day (e.g., Day 1, Day 2, etc.) and the session (morning vs. afternoon). ABEM also equates the results to ensure fairness across

different administrations. ABEM uses a multifaceted Rasch Model to ensure that test-takers are not penalized if a particular test is more difficult or if they are examined by an examiner who is a hard scorer. ABEM maintains historic performance for every administration of every case including difficulty for every single scoring element and a discrimination coefficient for every scored element. The statistical results from every Oral Exam administration are sent to the ABEM Certifying Examination Committee for review prior to posting examination results and sending them to the physician candidates. ABEM will continue these detailed analyses for the Certifying Exam.

At The Exam

12. What will ABEM provide for test takers who may need various accommodations?

Scheduling flexibility will still be offered to candidates for active military deployment schedules, religious observances, pregnancy/family leave, and fellowship commitments. Multiple exam administrations will take place each year, which will allow emergency physicians more flexibility in scheduling.

ABEM encourages candidates to travel the day before their scheduled exam day to reduce travel-related interruptions and travel anxiety. However, should something unexpected (e.g., weather, other travel delays, etc.) prevent a candidate from arriving for their scheduled time, ABEM will work to reseat the candidate at the administration, and if not possible, reschedule for a new administration week.

Onsite accommodations at the AIME center will include:

- Wellness rooms including accommodations for nursing mothers
- Altered schedules for nursing mothers
- Allowance for candidates to have medical aides as needed in the testing rooms
- Extra time to get to the testing room for those who needed it
- A quiet/meditation/prayer room for candidate use

Candidates with documented disabilities and who need specific ADA accommodations are required to complete a request for accommodations following ABEM policy.

13. The AIME Center is in North Carolina which is considered a restrictive state for reproductive rights. Will pregnant candidates be able to get care in case of emergency situations? ABEM has partnered locally with Wake Emergency Physicians so that any candidate or examiner experiencing an unanticipated and urgent emergency situation will get the care that they need.

14. What is the estimated cost of the Certifying Exam to candidates? ABEM has maintained the costs for initial certification for the last 10 years and has committed to not raise initial certification costs through the end of 2028. Currently, the fee for the Oral Exam is \$1,255. ABEM has been in contact with Merrill Lynch Wealth Management to explore and share various financial options and resources available to support candidates. Please reach out to Dan Fisher for financial guidance:

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15. What is the cost of travel? Travel to the testing center is variable depending on the cost of airfare. Lodging is conveniently near the testing center. ABEM will negotiate with local hotels to offer physicians discounted hotel costs.

16. What is the dress code? This will not be factored in the scoring of the exam. Candidates are encouraged to wear whatever they are most comfortable in (scrubs, business casual, etc.). If there is a logo on a candidate's attire it will be covered for the exam so that examiners will not be biased by your work or residency location.

Preparation for the Exam

- 17. What is the best way to prepare for the Certifying Exam?** Resources are available on the [ABEM website](#).

These resources include:

- Sample Case Videos
- Debrief Videos
- Scoring Guidelines
- Case References
- Case Summaries
- Procedures List
- Ultrasound List

Another option to learn about the Certifying Exam is to [request a speaker](#). We have reached over 120 EM residency programs to share the latest information on the Certifying Exam. If you haven't already, sign up to have an ABEM speaker share updates with your program.

- 18. What's next?** ABEM looks forward to keeping you informed as we roll out the Certifying Exam. Watch for emails from ABEM with updates.

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