In the last issue of *The Beam*, Dr. Duane Mezwa summarized some of the tools available to assist residents preparing for the new diagnostic radiology Core Examination. Since its inception, the ABR has worked to ensure that the Exam of the Future (EOF) meets the required psychometric standards. Equally important is providing the necessary information and assistance to residents to allow optimal preparation for the EOF.

In years past, the residents were totally focused on the separate physics and written examinations, which were not image rich and primarily tested factual information. What makes the new diagnostic radiology Core Examination so different, and what has the ABR accomplished to help you prepare for the new format?

The Core Examination is designed to test modality and organ system knowledge along with physics and patient safety. This approach has resulted in an examination grid that includes physics, patient safety, ten organ systems (MSK, GI, thoracic, genitourinary, neuro, pediatrics, cardiac, reproductive/endo, breast, and vascular/interventional), and six imaging modalities (MRI, ultrasound, nuclear medicine, radiography/fluoroscopy, CT, and interventional radiology). Therefore, 18 different sections need to be scored.

The increased number of sections has required a significant increase in the number of questions and the length of the examination to provide accurate psychometric evaluation. The new examination will be image rich and will provide a mix of questions. Forty percent of the questions will be factual, similar to the old written examination. The remaining 60 percent will test at a higher level (i.e., differential diagnosis and management concepts). In addition to multiple-choice questions, other types of questions will be included. The examination will consist of 660 questions and will be administered over one-and-a-half days at the Chicago and Tucson Exam Centers. Candidates will have their choice of two sessions: either September 30-October 1, 2013, or October 2-3, 2013.

How was this examination developed? Separate committees were configured with ABR volunteers and trustees to cover each organ system, physics, and patient safety, and additional individual experts were appointed for each imaging modality. The committees began their examination development process in 2009. Submitted questions were reviewed multiple times by the committees and ABR staff before selection for the examination. Questions on the examination will be randomly placed, unlike the oral examination where candidates know the organ system before taking the examination.
The ABR has provided tools on its website to assist candidates in preparing for the examination (www.theabr.org/eof-overview). Study guides have been available for several years. These tools provide sample questions and the material that may be on the examination for all organ systems listed above, as well as physics, patient safety, and ultrasound. More recently, the ABR added examination blueprints that provide a breakdown of the estimated percentage of content in each of the exam categories. This will, for example, inform the candidates what percentage of the MSK examination may include trauma, tumors, arthropathies, etc.

Another important step in the process for the ABR and the candidates was to evaluate the new examination and develop the software tools to assist candidates in answering the questions. Therefore, as an initial step, we allowed oral board candidates in Louisville to take two pilot exams during their oral examination visits. This process provided the board with useful information about exam performance and allowed candidates who passed a given module in the pilot exam to pass if they conditioned the oral exam in the same area.

In 2011, candidates were provided modules in six clinical areas (breast, MSK, neuro, pediatrics, cardiac, and vascular/interventional). Candidates were allowed to choose one of categories at the time of registration. In 2012, modules were available from all clinical areas included in the new Core Examination. Candidates were assigned one category and could choose the second. To ensure that the ABR had a high number of examinees in each category, candidates were required to take the assigned module first.

The board was given psychometric data on how the questions performed, and the residents provided feedback on the examination. Resident surveys were completed for both years. In 2011, 89 percent of residents agreed or strongly agreed that the questions were clearly stated. In 2012, 90 percent of residents responded similarly. When asked if the level of difficulty of the questions was appropriate, 61 percent and 68 percent responded positively in 2011 and 2012, respectively.

Residents were also queried as to whether the practice provided by these pilot modules was useful. In 2011, 70 percent responded positively, and in 2012, 81 percent found the pilot modules helpful. It was also important to evaluate the examination computer interface functionality. Positive responses regarding the interface tools were received from 87 percent of residents in 2011 and from 91 percent of residents in 2012.

This year the ABR has added two additional tools to assist residents. First, there is a new practice examination on the ABR website (www.theabr.org/dr-core-practice-exam). The practice examination uses the same computer interface and tools used in the ABR examination centers in Tucson and Chicago. It includes 109 sample questions with content from all areas on the Core Examination. The candidate can also become familiar with some of the new question types. It is important to note that anyone preparing for an ABR exam (MOC, Certifying, or Core) may find the practice examination useful.

Second, two administrations of a Core Pilot Examination are being offered at the ABR Exam Centers on June 20-21 and June 24-25, 2013. The Core Pilot Examination will be provided only this year. Each administration will consist of two sessions lasting 5 hours and 15 minutes over the two-day period (June 20-21 and June 24-25). This is the exact length of the Core Examination.
that will be given at the same exam centers September 30-October 4, 2013. All candidates eligible for the Core Examination are also eligible for the pilot.

The pilot examination experience will provide excellent practice for candidates. The ABR will also provide feedback to candidates regarding areas that may require more study preparation before the Core Examination. In addition, the ABR will gain valuable information regarding exam performance. The data provided on exam performance will permit potential modifications to improve the content before administration of the first “real” Core Examination this fall.