

## The Board Exam

**T**he Certifying Examination of the American Board of Nuclear Medicine (ABNM) is given early in September each year in three cities across the United States: one in the east, one in the mid-west and one in a city on the west coast.

Last year at this time, I served as the Chief Proctor for the examination, which was given in New York City. It was the third (and would be the last) time I had done so during my six-year term as an Active Member of the Board. And, of course, it was many years, 24 to be exact, since I had taken that examination, the first Certifying Examination of the ABNM.

Although I was acutely aware of my responsibilities to the Board and the examination process, clearly my involvement as a proctor was different from that when I was an examinee, or from the current 65 physicians who would assemble in the exam room on that Saturday in September. Many things had changed for me during those 24 years. And I was proctoring the exam, not taking it.

Why then, was I cranky the night before the exam? Why did I spend a sleepless night? Well, just as those taking the exam, I was apprehensive about over-sleeping. If I were late, there would be more than 5 dozen hostile reactions. No one would care if there was a delay because of an accident on the road or if I had a flat tire. I simply couldn't be late. So, I tossed and turned until it was an appropriate time to get out of bed and get on with the day leaving myself enough time for virtually any problem that might arise.

The day was forecast to be beautiful, blue sky, temperature in the 70s, low humidity. There were many things that I could be doing instead of spending the day proctoring an exam. Perhaps that explained some of my irritability.

Any distress that I had was nothing compared to what I encountered as those registered for the exam filed into the room. The stress was virtually palpable. I had brought an electric pencil sharpener that seemed to grind endlessly as candidate after candidate sharpened their number two pencils to a needle-like point. After a few minutes, I asked them to take their seats. I told them they would only need the pencils to mark the answer sheet; not as weapons. They laughed. Good, I thought, a little relief of their anxiety. I assured them that, like football players in a big game, they would feel better after the exam started. They laughed again. And I began to read the formal instructions to them.

I couldn't help but think about how wonderful this all was. There was a certain nobility to it. Men and women, at least in their late twenties, some older, assembling in an auditorium on a beautiful late summer weekend to demonstrate their preparedness to practice a medical specialty, in this case nuclear medicine. They had received their doctorates several years before. Most had already been certified by another specialty board. But they had continued to train, to study this marvelous body of knowledge that represents the specialty of nuclear medicine. The Examination Committee, drawn from all sections of the United States, had met repeatedly to prepare a thorough, unambiguous, but nevertheless challenging examination to fulfill its obligation to this process.

Here we were! After so many years of training, planning, preparation...all to assure that our behavior, our performance on behalf of patients still unknown to us will represent a suitable standard of competence defined by representatives of our specialty.

How nice to be part of such a process, I thought. Ladies and Gentlemen. You have three and a half hours for the AM examination. You may open your exam book.

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