

# ABNM: Helping Diplomates and Trainees During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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The American Board of Nuclear Medicine (ABNM) recognizes the strains under which diplomates are currently practicing and wants them to prioritize their time to serve the immediate needs of their practice, their families, and themselves. We realize that many medical professionals and trainees are working tirelessly to treat and monitor those exposed to or diagnosed with coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), and we recognize the associated enhanced health risks and potential for training disruptions. We have taken the actions outlined here after careful consideration of options available for our diplomates, candidates, staff, and the public.

The ABNM understands that physicians may not have time for nonurgent professional activities during the COVID-19 public health emergency and so extended the end of the first quarter of CertLink from March 31 to June 30, 2020, to give diplomates more time to answer the questions released in January 2020. Diplomates will not receive additional questions during this time (even those who have already completed their assignment), and no one will receive extra questions when new questions become available on July 1. The net effect will be a reduction in the total number of questions in 2020 by one-fourth. This action will have no impact on diplomates' CertLink performance as shown on their dashboards.

The ABNM also recognizes that COVID-19 has affected trainees and training programs. The ABNM leave policy was modified to allow an additional 2 weeks of leave (10 working days) in 2020 for all COVID-19-related reasons, including home quarantine. We also understand that cancellation/deferral of nonurgent medical procedures will reduce the number of diagnostic nuclear medicine studies performed in adults and children and will also likely reduce the number of oral radioiodine therapies for hyperthyroidism when thyroid scans are deferred and/or patients are maintained on antithyroid medication. The impact of COVID-19 on radioiodine treatment for thyroid cancer and parenteral therapies for other cancers is likely to be somewhat less but may still be significant. Because it may be impossible for residents who complete training this year to obtain experience with the required number of studies, the ABNM has made a 1-time modification of the case experience requirements in 2020 for all COVID-19-related reasons. The changed requirements include:

- Cardiovascular stress test supervision (exercise or pharmacologic): 75 studies (normally 100 studies).
- Pediatric nuclear medicine: 75 studies (normally 100 studies).
- Radiotherapy with  $^{131}\text{I}$ : 20 cases (at least 10 benign plus 10 malignant, including 3  $\leq$  33 mCi and 3  $>$  33 mCi) (normally 30 cases).
- Parenteral therapies requiring a written directive: 3 cases (normally 5 cases).



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Candidates for the ABNM certification examination are also required to be certified in advanced cardiac life support (ACLS). The American Heart Association is allowing a 60-day extension of ACLS instructor cards beyond the renewal date and recommends that employers and regulatory bodies extend provider cards 60 days beyond renewal date. The ABNM is adopting this recommendation:

- ACLS certification: 60-day extension beyond renewal date of current provider cards.

If trainees do not meet these modified requirements, program directors will be required to provide the ABNM with an educational plan and request for exemption that will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

The ABNM is still planning to give the Certification and Maintenance of Certification Examination during the first week of October 2020, with applications accepted April 1 through May 31. We are monitoring the situation very closely and will make adjustments if necessary.

The ABNM office staff is working remotely, but diplomates, program directors, and the public should notice no difference and receive the same level of excellent service that we always try to provide.

The ABNM recognizes the importance of the broad community of nuclear medicine professionals and all the work they are doing during the COVID-19 pandemic. We appreciate the patience of our diplomates and trainees during this chaotic time. We will continue to thoughtfully evaluate the situation as it evolves and notify our diplomates of any changes.