

Certifying Exam

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)

- 1. Why is ABEM moving to a new Certifying Exam?** Over the last two years, 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](#)

- 2. Will the Qualifying (written) Exam still be required for certification?** Yes, the Qualifying Exam will be the first assessment required for initial certification. Once you pass the Qualifying Exam, you can register for the Certifying Exam.
- 3. When will the new Certifying Exam start?** The Certifying Exam will 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 have the opportunity to be scheduled for the new Certifying Exam in 2026.
- 4. 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
 - ✓ Manual ultrasound skills
 - ✓ High-stakes communications and difficult conversations
 - ✓ Patient communications beyond diagnosis
 - ✓ Clinical Decision Making/Shared Decision Making
 - ✓ Prioritization
 - ✓ Leadership
 - ✓ Troubleshooting
 - ✓ Task Switching
- 5. What types of cases will there be?** There are two case types that make up the new Certifying Exam: Clinical Care cases and objective structured clinical examination (OSCE) cases.

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

OSCE cases will assess procedural skills, complex communication, professionalism, and other technical skills. Scenarios could involve standardized patient actors or procedural equipment.

- 6. 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 advanced physician assessment. This

professional assessment center was created by the American Board of Anesthesiology for high-stakes assessments for board certification. Other medical specialty Boards also use the AIME Center to assess physicians. Multiple exam administrations will take place each year, which will allow emergency physicians more flexibility in scheduling.

7. Why did ABEM select the AIME Center in Raleigh for the Certifying Exam?

ABEM visited a number of centers across the U.S. The AIME Center ensures that candidates receive a consistent exam experience. The Center offers more testing space for exams than large simulation centers. Additional information about the AIME Center selection can be found [here](#).

8. What is the estimated cost of the Certifying Exam to candidates?

ABEM does not anticipate significant changes in the aggregate costs for initial certification. Currently, of the 14 ABMS specialties that require an oral examination for certification, the ABEM oral examination is the third least expensive. Currently, the fee for the oral examination is \$1,255. Travel to the testing center is variable depending on the cost of airfare. Affordable lodging is conveniently near the testing center. ABEM will negotiate with local hotels to offer physicians reasonable hotel costs.

9. Why is the virtual Oral Examination being retired after 2025?

The virtual Oral Examination [measures unique competencies that are not measured on the Qualifying \(written\) Exam](#) and has been [shown to be a valid and reliable examination](#) process that differentiates ABEM-certified physicians from other providers. However, stakeholders agreed that additional competencies should be assessed in a way that is relevant to clinical practice.

>> [Stakeholder Feedback](#)

>> [Key Findings](#)

10. Are there data that support the need for a second exam (Oral Exam, Certifying 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 that demonstrate that the factors assessed in the ABEM oral examination are different than those assessed in the written Qualifying Examination 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 Examination is independently associated with the risk of a severe state medical board disciplinary action.

11. What data was obtained during the BCI process that led to the decision for a new exam?

A substantial amount of information about the BCI process and its findings have been posted on the [ABEM public website](#), including:

- [Key Findings](#)
- [Summary of Feedback](#)

12. 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 of competency.

- 13. Why can't the oral exam remain virtual?** The new Certifying Exam is not a relocation of the current examination—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.
- 14. What's next?** ABEM looks forward to keeping you informed as we roll out the new exam. Opportunities for informational sessions we be shared soon.

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