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Message to Program Directors and Chairs regarding DR Examination Security Policy

ABR Policy

The ABR's policy is to maintain a sufficient level of exam security to protect the integrity of all of its certification decisions which are based on examinations. Maintaining security ensures that the exam results issued by the ABR always reflect examinee attainment or maintenance of the knowledge, skill, and understanding essential to the practice of Diagnostic Radiology, Radiation Oncology, and Medical Physics; and, conversely, do NOT reflect unauthorized examinee access to information sources that may lead him/her to answer questions differently than he/she would have based solely on his/her own knowledge, skill, and understanding. Such unauthorized access to sources may include, but is not limited to: (1) giving or receiving confidential exam information at any time prior to, during, or after the administration of the exam, (2) possession of study materials in any medium by an examinee during the time period of the exam.

Rationale for and timing of the new policy ("Why this change and why now?")

- ABR is producing a totally new examination framework for Diagnostic Radiology Certification; exams will be more practice-relevant, and will engage the resident in higher-level cognitive processes beyond knowledge and comprehension, such as application, analysis, and management of patient cases.
- Based on practice analyses* and expert judgment, the ABR has constructed exam blueprints to guide the consistent creation of exam forms. In an effort to assist candidates in studying appropriate content for exams, study guides that parallel the exam blueprints have been posted on the ABR website. Sample questions (to illustrate all formats used on the Core exam) have also been posted.
- The examinations discriminate best if the questions are novel to each and every candidate who answers them.
- The new examinations are extremely resource-intensive to produce.
- All of the above make the previous custom of accumulating and studying from lists of questions on prior examinations inappropriate, unnecessary, intolerable, and illegal.
 - o The use of "reminiscences" (recalled items) is **inappropriate** because it evidences unprofessional behavior on the part of the test-taker, who has signed a statement acknowledging that respecting the integrity of the examinations requires not sharing or receiving information about specific questions and answers.
 - o The use of recalled questions is **unnecessary** because study guides and sample questions have been posted online and will continue to be updated; additionally, the

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knowledge that questions will address the most frequent and most important practice activities serves as sufficient guidance for candidate study plans.

- The use of recalled questions renders the situations encountered on the exam not novel, but memorized; as such, the exam will not measure higher-level management skills. If a question-sharing culture persists, the ABR will be obligated to produce exams of entirely new content each year, which will double exam production expenses. If ABR costs double, fees (which are cost-based) will necessarily be increased proportionately, a situation which the ABR regards as **intolerable** for candidates, diplomates, ABR trustees, and other stakeholders in the certification process.
 - The use of recalled questions is **illegal** because the items are copyrighted, and reproduction in any form represents violation of copyright law. The questions are protected intellectual property, and the ABR will take action to monitor question sharing by social media and other means. Specifically prohibited are the recording and/or transmission in any form of the questions, answer choices, and supposed correct answers.
- The public has the right to expect that diplomates of the ABR have attained that status because of their own knowledge, and not because of association with others who could tell them the answers to complicated questions or because they have had access to other sources to discover the correct answer. This is not, and has never been, an open-book test.
 - The six core competencies for successful completion of a medical specialty residency include professionalism:
 - “Residents must demonstrate a commitment to carrying out professional responsibilities, adherence to ethical principles, and sensitivity to a diverse patient population.” (ACGME, 1999)

Sharing recalled test questions violates the integrity of the certification examinations and contradicts any supposition that the candidate has displayed competence in professionalism.

Consequences of giving or receiving recalled questions:

Each candidate, on his/her registration form for the examination process signs to indicate agreement with the following statement:

“I further understand that irregular behavior before, during or after the examination such as copying answers, sharing information, using notes, or otherwise giving or obtaining unauthorized information or aid—evidenced by observation, statistical analysis of answers, or otherwise—on any portion of the examination will be reported to the Board and will constitute grounds for the invalidation of my examination, and may lead to my being judged unacceptable for certification by the Board. I recognize that examination booklets, examination questions, props for the computer based examination, and questions on the computer based examination are copyrighted as the sole property of the American Board of Radiology and must not be removed from the test area or reproduced, in whole or in part, and that any reproduction of

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copyrighted material, whether from memory or otherwise, is a federal offense and that I may be liable to pay damages incurred by the Board.”

The ABR has established a Professionalism Committee charged with, among other responsibilities, evaluation of violations of professionalism having to do with irregular behavior of examinees, whether occurring before, during, or after examinations. When the policy stated at the beginning of this document is deemed to have been violated, the following actions may be taken:

- a. Letter of warning or concern
- b. Invalidation of examination
 - i. Whenever evidence documents violation of the rules, or whenever, in the sole discretion of the Professionalism Committee, it appears that the integrity of the examination has been compromised...
- c. Denial of admission to the examination for a specified period and/or the requirement to retest
 - i. When it is established that the behavior involved actual examination-related materials given, received, or used during the examination, or when the irregular behavior manifests a conscious disregard for the integrity of the examination.
- d. Notification of others, such as program director, department chair, and/or external authorities
- e. Judgment as unacceptable for certification
 - i. When unprofessional behavior on the part of the examinee in question is determined to be sufficiently severe such that the examinee appears to lack the minimal level of professionalism required for board certification.
- f. Legal action for copyright violation

*The validity of the examinations is supported by practice analysis surveys of large numbers of practicing diagnostic radiologists; content of the examinations is based on knowledge and activities which are most frequently performed in practice, and most important to quality patient outcomes