

April 25, 2011

Message to Core Pilot Examinees regarding DR Examination Security Policy

Hello. I am Gary Becker, Executive Director of the American Board of Radiology. Welcome to the Diagnostic Radiology Core Pilot Examination, the ABR's first big step in transitioning its certifying exams from oral to computer-based. I want to take this opportunity to talk to you about a serious matter that will impact you and all of the Diagnostic Radiology trainees who follow you. A major culture change concerning ABR examinations is taking place. The Board recognizes that, in the past, resident-examinees have systematically shared exam questions with more junior trainees. Questions and answers have been memorized—sometimes verbatim—and contributed to extensive archives of old ABR test material that become the prized possessions of many residency programs. But now, with the first administration of ABR's Core Exam questions, this is all about to change. Let me explain why:

To serve the public, the ABR is duty-bound to protect the integrity of its certification decisions. This means maintaining the level of exam security necessary to ensure that ABR's exam results always reflect examinee attainment of the knowledge, skill, and understanding essential to practice, and that they do NOT reflect unauthorized access to exam content. Unauthorized access may include: (1) giving or receiving confidential exam information at any time prior to, during, or after the administration of the exam, or (2) study materials in any medium in an examinee's possession during the time period of the exam.

Accumulating and studying from lists of questions on prior examinations constitutes unauthorized access, is inappropriate, unnecessary, intolerable, and illegal.

Sharing recalled questions is **inappropriate** because it evidences unprofessional behavior on the part of the test-taker. It violates the integrity of ABR's examinations and undermines the public's trust that the candidate has demonstrated competence in professionalism. The public has the right to expect that diplomates of the ABR have

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been certified because of their knowledge and demonstration of core competencies, and not because of inappropriate access to proprietary ABR test information. ABR exams are not, and have never been open-book. Here are some excerpts from the ABR exam registration form each of you has signed:

“I ...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 ...constitute grounds for the invalidation of my examination, and may lead to my being judged unacceptable for certification by the Board. I recognize that [the] questions...are copyrighted as the sole property of the American Board of Radiology and must not be ... reproduced, in whole or in part, and that any reproduction of 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 use of recalled questions is **unnecessary** because study guides and sample questions have been posted online and will continue to be updated; additionally, the knowledge that questions are designed to address the most frequent and important practice activities serves as sufficient guidance for candidate study plans.

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 increase proportionately, a situation which the ABR regards as **intolerable** for candidates, diplomates, ABR trustees, and other stakeholders in the certification process.

Finally, the use of recalled questions is **illegal** because the questions are copyrighted, and reproduction in any form represents a violation of copyright law. The questions are protected intellectual property, and the ABR will take action to monitor

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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.

What about the consequences of giving or receiving recalled questions?

When the exam security policy is deemed to have been violated, any one or more of the following actions may be taken against you by the ABR:

- a. Letter of warning or concern
- b. Invalidation of your examination
- c. Denial of admission to ABR examinations for a specified period
- d. Notification of others, such as program director, department chair, external authorities
- e. You may be judged unacceptable for certification
- f. Legal action for copyright violation

In conclusion, ABR expects that you will leave this exam center with a renewed commitment to professionalism. Your program directors and department chairs will not condone or support ABR exam question-sharing by trainees. The legal departments at your institutions will not condone violations of copyright law. Please fulfill your contract with society as a professional who deserves the public trust. You can begin doing so by honoring your agreement with the ABR to safeguard the integrity of the examinations and by not sharing information about exam questions with friends or colleagues. Good luck on your exams!