Proctoring Options
(Online Proctoring and No Proctoring with Authentication)
Summary Report

Presenters:

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Background

When the ABP introduced the new Maintenance of Certification (MOC) Part 3 examination in early 2000s, it discontinued the take-home reexamination and required diplomates to test at a secure testing center. Some diplomates have since complained about the inconvenience of traveling to a testing center or the vendor's security protocols (e.g., using wands to search for hidden cameras). Such measures are perceived as demeaning. In response, the ABP is investigating alternatives, including online proctoring or no proctoring with authentication, to assess their feasibility while still ensuring a measure of accountability to the public.

Prior to the conference, participants were given the opportunity to take a mock test with online proctoring to simulate the experience from the perspective of an examinee (e.g., set-up, system requirements).

Key Points from Presentations

There were three presentations on various proctoring options. First, Dr. Lela Lee provided additional information about the pilot study she described as part of the *ABMS Panel Innovations in Testing from Other Member Board.* Overall, the pilot was felt to be successful, but there were technical problems including: not meeting system requirements, inadequate bandwidth, and difficulty downloading software because of firewalls. Those who participated noted they preferred online proctoring over traveling and taking the exam at the current secure testing center.

Next, Dr. David Foster discussed the nuts and bolts of online proctoring. He recommended the use of external cameras rather than those commonly integrated in laptops. These cameras would need to be purchased by the examinee or provided by the ABP. Foster reviewed the requirements, (i.e., high-speed Internet connection, quiet room), examinee authentication, communication capabilities between proctor and examinee, and the use of a locked-down browser. He emphasized the importance of maintaining a video and audio library of test sessions in case questions of security come up. He also stressed the importance of selecting a reputable vendor as they vary widely in the level of security they provide. He concluded by sharing a set of guidelines Caveon developed regarding online proctoring.

Dr. Linda Althouse then presented information about administering an examination without proctoring but with candidate authentication. The third-party process uses information from a public database to generate real-time questions that only the examinee could answer correctly (e.g., former addresses).

Key Points from Breakout Sessions

There are several potential advantages of these proctoring options compared to a testing center: the ability to take the exam in a familiar environment instead of traveling to a test center, the ability to access the web, lower direct administration costs, and the possibility of providing feedback during the exam, which is difficult to do in a test center.

However, there are also numerous potential technical issues with online proctoring. Many conference attendees who attempted to take the mock test were unable to download the necessary software, especially if they were attempting to use an office computer. Even those who were happy with their experiences felt that a less tech savvy user might get flustered by the set-up instructions.

Other disadvantages include potential loss of connectivity during testing, inadequate bandwidth, inconsistencies between personal computers that might be important in viewing graphics, and the potential lack of immediate technical support to those encountering difficulties during an examination. In addition, although the thought of testing in a familiar setting was appealing, finding an appropriate, quiet room with no interruptions for 4 hours could be difficult. Additional security risks such as cameras used to capture exam content might be greater, which in turn could increase indirect costs by requiring the development of additional exam questions.

Although the no-proctoring option reduces the issues associated with software installation and the need for technical support, it presents a greater risk to exam security and accountability.

Conclusions

Ultimately, it was felt that the ABP needed to decide on the purpose and format of the MOC exam prior to choosing the appropriate proctoring solution. If the purpose continues to be assessment of knowledge to provide assurance to the public, then some level of proctoring, either in a secure test center or online, remains necessary. But if the examination was determined to be more formative and continuous in its purpose and format, authentication without proctoring might be more appropriate. The group remained convinced, however, that secure testing centers are essential for administering the initial certification exam.