

# National Board Report

A Quarterly Newsletter of the National Board Examination Committee for Veterinary Medicine

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## Five Years and Counting

This issue of the *National Board Report* begins Volume 5, so that means that the NBEC is beginning its fifth year as an independent organization. One of our first activities in January 1995 was to begin to publish a quarterly newsletter to keep our constituents informed of new developments in the licensure examination program.

The NBEC has made a lot of progress since separating from the AVMA at the end of 1994. Because the NBEC is now an independent not-for-profit corporation, one of the issues discussed at last month's NBEC meeting was whether to change the name of the organization to reflect that it is not really a "committee" any more. No final decision was made, but the idea certainly has merit.

There is no question that the NBEC is stronger and more focused now than it was as a committee of the AVMA. Our relations with the American Association of Veterinary State Boards (AAVSB) and the Canadian National Examining Board are better than ever. We have a secure financial foundation, a dedicated staff, and an efficient office. The new computer based NAVLE will debut in only nine months and, as noted on page 3, the NBEC is beginning to take a serious look at innovative new approaches to the assessment of clinical skills in veterinary medicine.

The past five years were certainly exciting, and the next five years promise more of the same.

John R. Boyce, DVM, PhD  
Executive Director

## Update on NAVLE Plans

At its January 22 meeting, the NBEC made several decisions on the new North American Veterinary Licensing Examination (NAVLE). Here are the highlights. For more information, see the NBEC's web site <[www.nbec.org](http://www.nbec.org)>.

### NAVLE Format

Administration of the computer based NAVLE will differ significantly from the procedures used for the NBE and CCT. NAVLE candidates will report to the testing center 30 minutes before the test is scheduled to begin. This will allow them sufficient time to check in, be photographed, store their personal belongings, and prepare to take the examination. The NAVLE will be administered over a 7.5 hour period, as follows:

- a 15 minute orientation and tutorial, to ensure that the candidate is comfortable with the operation of the computer;
- three blocks of 60 items, with 65 minutes for each block;
- a 45 minute break;
- three more blocks of 60 items, with 65 minutes per block.

Candidates will not be able to take a break during a block. If they finish a block of items before the end of the 65 minutes, they may take a break before beginning the next block. During a block, candidates may skip items, mark items, and change answers to items. However, once a block is finished, candidates will not be able to go back and review items or change their answers to items in that block. The computer will keep track of total testing time and break time.

### Blueprint

The NAVLE blueprint specifies the subject matter content of each NAVLE form. The committee adjusted the allocation of

items to certain species areas, and created a new content area for items that are relevant to entry level private clinical practice, but do not apply to any single species. The animal species dimension of the new blueprint now consists of:

- canine (26%)
- feline (22%)
- pet bird (3%)
- other small animal (3%)
- bovine (15%)
- porcine (7%)
- ovine/caprine (2%)
- equine (16%)
- public health, non-species specific, and poultry (6%)

A more detailed outline of the revised blueprint can be found on the NBEC's web site.

### Electronic registration

The NBEC gave the go-ahead to the development of an on-line registration system for NAVLE candidates. If it is acceptable to the licensing board through which the candidate is applying, candidates will be able to complete the NAVLE application form on-line and pay the NAVLE fee by credit card.

Candidates will also be able to apply for the NAVLE using a paper application form, and pay by cashier's check. Candidates must use the application and payment method required by the individual licensing board.

### CD will not be produced

Citing the high costs involved, the NBEC decided not to produce a candidate CD. The plan was to give each NAVLE candidate a CD containing a practice version of the examination, a video tour of a Sylvan testing center, the candidate information bulletin, and a NAVLE application form. Instead of

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## CPE Update

As noted in previous issues of the *National Board Report*, the AAVSB has asked to assume responsibility for the Educational Commission for Foreign Veterinary Graduates (ECFVG) program, now operated by the AVMA. The AAVSB has also requested that responsibility for the Clinical Proficiency Examination (CPE), the four day clinical skills examination required as step four of the ECFVG program, be transferred to the NBEC. In October, an AVMA task force met to develop a Request for Proposal (RFP) to identify an outside testing organization to manage certain aspects of the CPE. The NBEC was represented on the task force by Drs. Nancy Collins and David Sandals; Dr. James Dalley represented the AAVSB. The RFP is now being finalized.

At its January meeting, the NBEC agreed to continue to cooperate with the AVMA on the development of the RFP, but decided not to submit a proposal. Instead, the NBEC will begin development of its own clinical skills assessment (see page 3). The AAVSB, seeking to respond to the desires of its member boards, is prepared to develop a new foreign graduate certification program, if necessary. Likewise, the NBEC is prepared to develop an examination to be used as part of a new foreign graduate certification program.

The AVMA has proposed a meeting of representatives of the AVMA, AAVSB, and NBEC to discuss these issues. The meeting is to be held in Schaumburg later this year. The NBEC and the AAVSB have agreed to participate in the meeting.

## From the Past: History of the NBEC

### Number 14 in a Series

Should veterinary schools have access to the scores their students achieve on the national licensing examinations? That question was debated for many years by the NBEC and its predecessor organization, the National Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners (NBVME).

The earliest mention of this subject is in the minutes of the NBVME's March 1961 meeting, where the topic was referred to the AVMA Council on Education (COE). At the August 1962 meeting, a request from Tuskegee Institute for data on the performance of its graduates on the NBE was considered, but no action was taken until the COE made its decision.

The issue was revisited in 1963 at a joint meeting of the NBVME and the Association of American Boards of Examiners in Veterinary Medicine (predecessor to the AAVSB). Dr. Lillian Long, Director of the Professional Examination Service, commented that in order to properly evaluate a curriculum, "two extensive examinations should be given, one each after the second and fourth professional years." Dr. Long felt that the NBE would not yield "tangible results" for evaluation of veterinary school curricula.

In 1964 and again in 1965, Dr. Melvin Swenson raised the issue of school score reports. The major concerns noted were cost, candidate identification (which would have to come from the licensing boards), and the fact that the NBE was a licensing examination and "would be unsuitable for evaluating

teaching."

PES submitted a special report on this topic to the NBVME in 1968. The report noted that fourteen years of NBE score data provided "a wealth of information about the state of the veterinary medical profession." While the report outlined a broad approach to measurement in veterinary medical education, including standardized achievement and admissions tests, it did not support release of NBE score data to schools. The report was referred to the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges (AAVMC).

In 1973, Tuskegee again requested information on the performance of its graduates on the NBE. The NBVME reiterated its policy of "not providing information for comparative or evaluation purposes." This policy was reaffirmed by the board in 1975.

The issue was finally resolved at the meeting of the NBVME's Executive Committee in January 1976. In response to a request from the Council of Deans of the AAVMC, the Executive Committee "agreed to modify the information collection and recording system so that a report could be made to each school and college, indicating the average performance of its graduates as compared to the average performance of all other candidates on that examination form." It was not until 1984, however, that the actual school score reports were approved.

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## New Clinical Skills Assessment Proposed

Recognizing a need for a tool to evaluate the clinical skills of a variety of licensure candidates, and realizing the limitations of the present examinations, the NBEC will look into developing a new clinical skills assessment.

Before the NBE was first administered in 1954, each individual licensing board had its own examination. Many of these were practical examinations, where candidates had to demonstrate competency in certain clinical skills. With the advent of the NBE and especially after the adoption of the CCT in the early 1980's, the state board practical examinations began to disappear. This was hastened by the high costs involved with administering practical examinations, and difficulty standardizing and scoring them. The last extensive state practical examination, New York's, was eliminated a few years ago.

Beginning in November, the NAVLE will replace both the NBE and CCT. The NAVLE will allow the use of graphics in questions for the first time, and each question on the NAVLE will be relevant to entry-

level private clinical practice. However, the loss of the clinical problem solving aspect of the CCT has not gone unnoticed.

The Clinical Proficiency Examination (CPE), required for graduates of non-accredited schools as part of the ECFVG program, is a proven tool for assessing clinical skills, but it takes three and a half days, and now costs \$6000. Standardization of the CPE across multiple sites has also been a challenge.

The NBEC's practice specific examinations (see page 4) are limited by their multiple choice format.

Last month, the NBEC decided to begin to develop a new clinical skills assessment. This new examination will focus on skills important for competent clinical practice. In particular, it will test skills that cannot be assessed with the NAVLE, such as communications and diagnostic skills. The new examination will be designed for a variety of candidates, including graduates of non-accredited colleges,

veterinarians facing disciplinary action by a licensing board, and veterinarians who have been out of practice for some time and who are seeking a license to practice in another jurisdiction. Eventually, the new clinical skills assessment may be offered to all licensure candidates.

The NBEC has scheduled a meeting with staff of the National Board of Medical Examiners in April to look in detail at some of the available options. These may include computer based case simulations (similar to the CCT, but using open ended responses), and standardized patient examinations (where the candidate interacts with a patient, or, in the case of veterinary medicine, with a client and an animal patient). Both of these approaches are now being used in other medical professions.

The NBEC designated Drs. Nancy Collins, James Dalley, and Donald Draper to look at the options and prepare a report for the NBEC. Watch for further developments in future issues of the *National Board Report*.

## NBEC Member Profile: Dr. Jan Krehbiel

Dr. Jan Krehbiel is the NBEC's newest member. Appointed last year as the representative of the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges (AAVMC), he attended his first meeting as an NBEC member last month.

Dr. Krehbiel presently serves as Associate Dean for Academic and Student Affairs at the College of Veterinary Medicine at Michigan State University, a position he has held for the past 10 years. He joined the MSU faculty in 1966 as a small animal clinician. Later, he was awarded a research fellowship in pathology and earned a PhD degree in veterinary pathology in 1972. Dr. Krehbiel is board certified in anatomic and clinical pathology.

A native of south central Kansas, Dr. Krehbiel received his DVM degree from Kansas State in 1962. He spent two years in private practice and two years in the US Air

Force before moving to Michigan, where he has been ever since.

A keen interest in organized veterinary medicine has led Dr. Krehbiel to a variety of volunteer positions, including service with the American Board of Veterinary Pathology (chair of the Examination Committee), the AVMA (member and chair of the Informatics Committee), the AAVMC (academic deans group executive committee and chair), and the Michigan Veterinary Medical Association (Executive Board for four years and MVMA President in 1999).

In keeping with his farm background, Dr. Krehbiel and his family live on a farm where they have raised purebred Suffolk sheep for 25 years. He also has a passion for John Deere tractors.

Dr. Krehbiel is active in the East Lansing Arts Chorale and the Peoples Church Choir.



## New Focus for Disciplinary Examinations

The NBEC has offered practice specific disciplinary examinations to licensing boards since 1997. These examinations, covering small animal and equine practice, were designed to be used by licensing boards in cases where a veterinarian is facing disciplinary action and where the veterinarian's knowledge of veterinary medicine is questioned.

The examinations consist of 100 multiple choice questions, selected from the NBE item bank.

Several licensing boards have approached the NBEC about using the disciplinary examinations for other purposes. One specific request was to use them to assess the knowledge of veterinarians who have been out of practice for some time and who are seeking a license to practice in another jurisdiction. Some boards now require such candidates to retake the NBE and/or CCT. However, many of these individuals are at a disadvantage because they have been out of school

for some time and most of them have limited practice experience with the variety of animal species covered by the NBE and CCT. Since the NBE and CCT will be gone after April, the only choice would be the NAVLE, but it, too, covers all animal species and is targeted at the entry-level candidate.

At its January meeting, the NBEC agreed to make the disciplinary examinations available to licensing boards for use in evaluating the licensure candidates mentioned above. The examinations will now be referred to as species specific examinations. The NBEC hopes to be able to offer the present examinations until another assessment can be developed to fill the need.

The NBEC also decided to recommend that candidates be limited to two attempts to pass the species specific examinations.

Boards interested in more information on these examinations should contact the NBEC office.

## Update on NAVLE Plans (continued from page 1)

distributing CD's, which cannot be changed once they are produced, the NBEC will provide the same information through its web site. The web-based practice examination will be designed to duplicate the actual Sylvan interface. A printed version of the candidate bulletin will also be produced, and it will also contain the sample questions.

### Sylvan testing centers

The NBEC received an update on the availability of Sylvan testing centers in North America. There are now over 300 such centers. The NAVLE will be listed on the Sylvan web site ([www.sylvanprometric.com](http://www.sylvanprometric.com)) soon. Until then, candidates can look under "Step 1 USMLE" to see a list of locations where the NAVLE will be given. Keep in mind that Sylvan testing centers open, move, and close from time to time, so the listings may change between now and November.

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