

# National Board Report

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

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## Reality Check

It's that time of the year again. Each May, we receive calls from candidates who are graduating from veterinary school and have just found out that they have not passed the NBE and/or CCT. Since the exams are offered only in April and December, they have a long time to wait before they can take them again.

The majority of candidates take the NBE and CCT for the first time in December of their senior year, so many of those taking the exams in April have already failed them once in December.

Employment options for these veterinarians are limited. A few licensing boards offer a temporary, provisional, or restricted license, allowing individuals to practice under the direct supervision of a licensed veterinarian until they can pass the licensing exams. There are positions available in academia, industry, and government for which a license is not required, but most of these people were planning to enter private clinical practice; some already had a job lined up when they received the bad news.

When the NBEC went to criterion referenced scoring in 1992, it was theoretically possible for all candidates to pass the examinations, because a pre-determined percentage no longer failed, as was the case with norm referenced scoring. However, we have seen little change in the overall passing rates since then. Candidates need to understand that licensing examinations are serious business, and that they have to prepare themselves to pass. That's the nature of the real world.

John R. Boyce, DVM, PhD  
Executive Director

## NBEC Update

Here is a summary of several items on the NBEC's agenda.

### NAVLE School Contacts

We have asked each veterinary school in North America to designate one staff member to serve as the NAVLE contact person for that school. The contact persons will be added to the *National Board Report* mailing list, and will be sent periodic updates on the NAVLE as we move toward the November 2000 implementation. Students now completing their sophomore year will be the first ones to take the NAVLE. The NBEC is working on a variety of approaches to candidate education and information.

### Clinical Proficiency Examination

As noted in the previous issue of the *National Board Report*, the NBEC submitted a proposal to the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) Executive Board in April, offering to assume responsibility for the operation of the Clinical Proficiency Examination (CPE), the clinical skills examination offered as part of the certification program of the Educational Commission for Foreign Veterinary Graduates (ECFVG). The Executive Board tabled the NBEC's proposal and instead created a task force to develop a Request for Proposal for outsourcing the CPE. The NBEC was asked to nominate two members to the eight member task force. The NBEC has accepted the invitation to participate on the task force, and has recommended that Drs. David Sandals and John Boyce serve as NBEC representatives.

The American Association of Veterinary State Boards (AAVSB) was also asked to name a representative to the task force, but has not yet decided whether to participate. The AAVSB has supported transferring the CPE to

the NBEC, and has also asked to initiate discussions with the AVMA regarding transfer the administrative functions of the ECFVG program to the AAVSB.

### School Score Reports

The AVMA's Council on Education is recognized by the US Department of Education as the body responsible for accreditation of veterinary schools in the US. One of the Department's requirements is that the Council use outcomes measures to evaluate its accreditation essentials, and performance of students on national licensing examinations is one of the measures accepted by the Department. The Council has asked the NBEC to provide summary school score reports to use for this purpose. In January, the NBEC agreed in principle to do this, pending approval from the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges and the NBEC's legal counsel. The NBEC is now finalizing a plan to provide score reports to the Council in a format that will be useful, while maintaining the confidentiality of the score data. Under no circumstances will individual candidate scores be released to the AVMA.

### New Position for Dr. Groves

Last month, NBEC Chair Dr. Michael Groves was named Interim Dean of the School of Veterinary Medicine at Louisiana State University. Dr. Groves previously served as Head of the Department of Epidemiology and Community Health and Director of the Louisiana Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory. Congratulations to Dr. Groves on his new position.

### July NBEC meeting

The NBEC will meet in General Session on Tuesday, July 13 at the Sheraton New Orleans hotel. The meeting will begin at 8:30 am in the Bayside A room, and is open to all.

## Meeting with the Deans

In March, the NBEC Executive Director participated in the annual meeting of the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges (AAVMC) in Washington, DC. The meeting offered an opportunity to bring the audience, consisting largely of veterinary school deans and associate deans, up to date on planning for the NAVLE.

Dr. Boyce's presentation covered three points: the purpose of a licensing examination (ensuring the public that licensees meet a minimum level of competence), the fact that licensing examinations focus exclusively on private clinical practice, and the problems that can develop when employers require applicants to possess a license to practice, even for jobs that do not involve private clinical practice (many government and industry positions, for example). A license is seen by many employers as a valuable credential and a measure of competence. Preference may be given to an applicant who possesses a license over one who does not.

The AAVMC authorized the NBEC to release summary school score reports to the AVMA Council on Education, to help the Council meet the requirements of an accrediting body recognized by the US Department of Education.

The meeting featured a presentation by Dr. Victor Cubillos of Valdivia, Chile, President of the Pan American Federation of Veterinary Science Faculties (pictured at right with Dr. Boyce). Dr. Cubillos presented an overview of veterinary medical education and credentialing in Latin America.

## From the Past: History of the NBEC

### Number 13 in a Series

The foundation of an examination is the blueprint. The blueprint specifies the content coverage of the examination and how many items are assigned to each content area. For a licensing examination, the blueprint should reflect not necessarily what is taught in school, but what is required for competent entry-level practice. Blueprints are revised as the nature of the profession changes.

The blueprint for the first NBE assigned the 435 items into the following categories: anatomy, physiology, physiological chemistry, pathology, bacteriology, hygiene, parasitology, physical diagnosis, medicine, surgery, and obstetrics. This classification represented the knowledge base required for an entry-level veterinarian in the mid 1950's.

Surprisingly few changes were made to the blueprint through the early 1970's. A report by a special steering committee in 1976 noted that "there has been little or

no change in the coding of questions or the distribution of exam items for many years."

Computerization of the item bank in the mid 1970's allowed the National Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners (NBVME) to take a new look at the NBE blueprint.

At the January 1978 NBVME meeting, Dr. B.E. Hooper was asked "to prepare a proposal for a classification revision for review by the board tomorrow." Dr. Hooper's subcommittee, which included Drs. B.E. Denholm, J.M. Arnoldi, S.E. Strahm, R.R. Shomer, W. Kay and E.R. Ames, came up with a three dimensional blueprint, consisting of organ system, animal species, and discipline categories.

The following year, Dr. Hooper's committee further developed the blueprint, devising a three dimensional "cube model" and assigning weights to the various categories of the blueprint. At the NBVME meeting the following day, the recommendations from the committee were approved, and the new blueprint was finalized. The minutes note that "Dr. Shomer and other members of the Board thanked Dr. Hooper for his report, and Dr. Albrecht called for a round of applause, which was enjoyed by all."

The three-dimensional blueprint approved in 1979 would serve as the basis for the NBE, with minor modifications, for the next 20 years.

*Next issue: The NBVME becomes the NBEC.*



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## Examination Development: Item Writing

Perhaps the most labor intensive step in the development of an examination is item writing. Good items are the key to a good examination, and good multiple choice items are hard to write. The NBEC and the National Board of Medical Examiners (NBME) are working to ensure that all newly written NAVLE items meet high standards for quality and clinical relevance.

The item writing process began with the appointment of a group of 25 item writers. The item writers represent a cross section of the profession, with representatives from academia and private practice. Each item writer was asked to write 50 items. The item writers met at the NBME office in Philadelphia in February for an item writing workshop. NBME staff reviewed the characteristics of a good item and pointed out some common flaws with examination items. NAVLE items will target application of knowledge, not just recognition and

recall of isolated facts. Clinical vignettes will be used extensively.

All NAVLE items will be four or five option multiple choice items, with only one correct answer. A proportion of the items (the goal is 10%) will include some type of graphic information (photograph, radiograph, chart, etc.). Item writers were instructed to ensure that new items address one or more areas of the NAVLE blueprint. The blueprint, approved by the NBEC in 1997, classifies items by veterinary practice role, animal species, and important clinical issue/diagnosis.

All newly written items will be submitted to the NBME this summer, and drafts will be returned to item writers for review. In November, the NBME will convene an item review meeting in Philadelphia, where the item writers will review all the newly written items, ensure that they are accurately classified, and judge whether they are acceptable for addition to the NAVLE item bank.

Item modeling is a technique that will be used to enable item writers to develop multiple items covering the same content area. This will facilitate the construction of parallel forms of the NAVLE. It also can improve the efficiency of the item writing process.

Concurrent with the NBME's efforts, the Professional Examination Service (PES) and its Consultant Advisory Board are also working this year to develop new items for use on the NAVLE. PES has completed the development of final forms of the NBE and CCT, which will be administered for the last time in April 2000, but as part of its contract with the NBEC has agreed to assist in the development of NAVLE items, particularly those with graphic information. The NBEC appreciates the cooperation of PES and its advisory board in this important effort.



## NBEC Member Profile: Dr. David Sandals

Dr. David Sandals is appointed to the NBEC by the National Examining Board of the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association. First appointed in 1996, Dr Sandals was recently reappointed for a second term as NEB representative.

A native of Brampton, Ontario, Dr Sandals graduated from the Ontario Veterinary College, University of Guelph in 1972. After graduation, he moved to Vegreville, Alberta to work in a predominantly large animal practice. After two years in Western Canada, he returned to Guelph to take a position in the ambulatory clinic at his alma mater. This year marks his 25th as a member of the Field Service Clinic. Periodically over that time and more recently during the last three years, Dr. Sandals has served as Clinic Head for the service unit of the Veterinary Teaching Hospital.

Dr. Sandals completed his MSc degree in 1989, the thesis topic

being the prevalence and seroepidemiology of bovine parvovirus.

In 1986, Dr Sandals was elected to the Council of the Ontario Veterinary Association (the licensing body in Ontario now called the College of Veterinarians of Ontario or CVO). He served as President of the Association in 1988-89. Upon his retirement from the Council in 1995, he was awarded the lifetime achievement award.

In 1992, the CVO appointed Dr. Sandals to represent the province on the National Examining Board (NEB). He was appointed chair of the NEB in 1996. As part of the NEB's role on the AVMA's Council on Education, Dr Sandals has participated in accreditation visits to 13 veterinary colleges. Dr Sandals' major initiative for the NEB has been leading the process to enhance the Clinical Proficiency Examination, a project just reaching fruition.

Dr Sandals and his wife

Elizabeth have two children. Their son Richard is enrolled in a Masters program at Indiana University in music performance, and their daughter Allison is entering her third year in the hotel and food administration program at the University of Guelph. The Sandals family enjoyed building and now enjoys relaxing at their summer cottage on Lake Muskoka.



## NBEC Web Site Offers Easy Access to Information

Candidates, licensing boards, and others can find a great deal of information on the NBEC and its programs by pointing their web browsers to <<http://www.nbec.org>>.

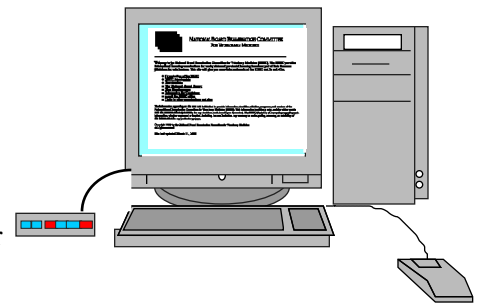
First established in 1997, the site is regularly expanded and updated. A sampling of the information now available on the site includes:

- a list of NBEC members with links to the organizations they represent.
- each issue of the NBEC newsletter, available as text-only and now also in Adobe Acrobat "pdf" format. Acrobat Reader may be downloaded free from <<http://www.adobe.com>>.
- electronic versions of the NBE and CCT Candidate Information Booklets.
- a computer based practice CCT developed by PES (which works with Netscape version 3.0 or higher).
- up to date information on the NAVLE.
- a research paper on the 1997 NAVLE job analysis study.

- order forms for practice versions of the NBE and CCT.
- a score report transfer application for the AAVSB's Veterinary Information Verifying Agency (VIVA).

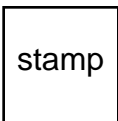
Feedback on the web site is always appreciated. Given the variety of e-mail messages received from people who have accessed the site, including many from other countries, the site is a useful resource. It allows candidates and others convenient and immediate access to information on the NBEC and its programs, without the inconvenience, expense, and delay involved in mailing and faxing documents.

The web site was created with Claris Home Page and is located on the server of the NBEC's Bismarck-based internet service provider, The Internet Connection. It's not fancy or elaborate, but it provides basic information and doesn't take long to load!



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