

National Board Report

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

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Setting the Record Straight

In an article in the November 1, 2000 issue of the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*, AVMA Executive Vice President Bruce W. Little states that step 3 of the Educational Commission for Foreign Veterinary Graduates (ECFVG) program is "designed to...test basic science knowledge."

Until April this year, ECFVG step 3 required candidates to pass the National Board Examination (NBE) and the Clinical Competency Test (CCT). The new North American Veterinary Licensing Examination (NAVLE), which has replaced both the NBE and CCT, is now required for ECFVG step 3.

The NBE, CCT, and NAVLE are licensing examinations. None of them can be considered to be a test of basic science knowledge.

The NBE, which has been in use since 1954, is a comprehensive test of veterinary medical knowledge. While earlier forms of the NBE included many items that could be considered basic science items, the NBE was always designed to evaluate knowledge deemed important for practice. Since 1992, the NBE has been constructed using a three dimensional blueprint consisting of veterinary practice role, animal species, and organ system. In its final eight years, the NBE included many items that required clinical decision making skills, and it did not include any pure basic science items.

The CCT was specifically designed to test problem solving and case management skills, and can in no way be considered a test of basic science knowledge.

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Richard S. Hawe

The NBEC was shocked and saddened to learn of the death of Dr. Richard Hawe on November 18, of a heart attack. Dr. Hawe, a small animal practitioner from Alexandria, VA, represented the AVMA Council on Education on the NBEC. Prior to that, he served for nine years on the NBEC as one of the two representatives of the American Animal Hospital Association.

Dr. Hawe, a 1975 graduate of the College of Veterinary Medicine at



the University of Georgia, was a partner in the Alexandria Animal Hospital, a cat clinic, and an emergency practice. He was a diplomate of the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners.

Dr. Hawe was a tireless worker on behalf of the NBEC, serving as an item writer, and on many item review committees. He involved several of his colleagues in service to the profession through the NBEC.

Dr. Hawe is survived by his wife Marlene, and two teenage daughters.

NAVLE Now Underway

Candidates began taking the new North American Veterinary Licensing Examination (NAVLE) at Prometric computer testing centers on Monday, November 20. The testing window runs through December 16.

A total of 2920 candidates registered to take the NAVLE during the November-December testing window. While the Prometric testing centers located near the 31 North American veterinary schools will serve the majority of NAVLE candidates, the NAVLE will be given this fall at nearly 270 different testing centers.

NAVLE registrations for each of the four weeks of the window show 45% of the candidates have scheduled to take the exam during the last week (December 11-16). However, 95 candidates were scheduled to take the NAVLE on "opening day," November 20.

The NBEC approved 14 requests from licensing boards for test accommodations for candidates with

disabilities. Most of these were handled by providing additional testing time, but a few required more extensive accommodations. Several other inquiries were received and handled without the need to provide special accommodations.

Scores from examinations taken during the first window will be reported to licensing boards by the end of January. Boards will then report scores to candidates. This means that the turnaround time for applications for the April window will be short, a few weeks at most. There are far fewer total candidates in April, and we will have the on-line application and payment option available to candidates by then. Nevertheless, candidates who do not pass the NAVLE on their first attempt will have to move quickly to meet the application deadlines for the April administration.

On behalf of the NBEC, thanks to all the staff at licensing board offices and at the NBME who worked hard to get the first NAVLE administration up and running successfully.

Item Writers Meet in Philly

On November 2-3, 22 NAVLE item writers met in Philadelphia at the National Board of Medical Examiners (NBME) to review newly written items for addition to the NAVLE item bank. NAVLE items are developed by a group of trained item writers, who are asked to submit 50 items per year in their content area. NAVLE item development is coordinated by NBME staff.

This year's NAVLE item writers included Drs. Eric Anderson, Christopher Brown, Paul Coe, Benjamin Darien, Sherrill Davison, Cate Dewey, Vicki Douglas, Gary Gackstetter, Hans Gelens, Joseph Harari, Walter Hylton, James Johnson, Michelle Kopcha, Mike Lappin, David Panciera, Patricia Provost, David Reeves, Stan Rubin, Helen Tuzio, Ame Walesby, Frank Welcome, Elaine Wexler-Mitchell, Colette Wheler, and Alice Wolf. The NBEC thanks each of these people for their dedication and hard work.

Just as I was preparing to leave for Philadelphia, tornadoes hit the Bismarck area. We don't get tornadoes here that often, and have never had them in November, but several actually touched down in Bismarck and caused damage to several dozen homes. Fortunately, they missed us, but I decided that I should stay home instead of trying to leave literally while the warning sirens were sounding. Capping off the strange weather was a switch to more typical weather (cold and snow), less than 24 hours after the tornadoes left town.

From the Past: History of the NBEC

Number 17 in a Series

The National Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners (NBVME) was established by the AVMA in 1948. Quoting from the November 1948 issue of the *Journal of the AVMA*: "The purpose of this board shall be to establish a qualifying examination of such a character that the certificates awarded successful candidates may be acceptable to all state veterinary examining boards as ample evidence of professional qualification for the practice of veterinary medicine, subject to the licensing requirements of the laws of the various states."

The initial plan was for the NBVME to administer its examination directly to candidates, and issue passing candidates a "certificate of qualification." This plan was soon modified, however. Several state licensing boards were concerned that the "National Board" would be seen as usurping the rights of the individual state licensing boards. At a conference held during the 1955 AVMA Annual Meeting, Dr. W.R. Krill, then Dean of the College of Veterinary Medicine at Ohio State and one of the forces behind the formation of the NBVME, stated, "...there was no intent on the part of the National Board to usurp the states' individual control of licensing. The examinations were merely to furnish the state boards an examination service and certify to them the results of a comprehensive examination in veterinary medical subjects in lieu of their own existing *written* examinations." By the time the first NBE was administered in

1954, the NBVME had decided to provide its examination to the state licensing boards, instead of directly to candidates. The original certificate of qualification was replaced by an official score report issued by the Interstate Reporting Service.

At the March 1957 meeting of the NBVME's Executive Committee, the idea of changing the organization's name was discussed, in an effort to allay concerns that were apparently still being raised about the "National Board." At the general meeting of the NBVME in August 1957, motion was made to make no change to the name.

Over the years, the NBVME, which was originally intended to function as an independent organization, began to operate more and more like a committee of the AVMA. Therefore, when the organization was reorganized in the late 1970's, the name was changed to National Board Examination Committee (NBEC), and the NBEC became fully integrated into the AVMA structure.

When the NBEC became an independent organization in 1994, some thought was given to changing the name, but, for various reasons, no change was made. Recently, several NBEC members have again suggested that the NBEC consider a name change, to reflect the fact that the NBEC is no longer a committee, but an independent organization. This topic will be discussed at the January meeting in San Diego.

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The purpose of the *National Board Report* is to educate, to inform, and to communicate information about the objectives and programs of the NBEC. The opinions and views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the official opinions, views, or policies of the NBEC or any of its members, unless expressly so stated.

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Qualifying Examination Committee Begins Work

On December 7-8, work will begin on the new qualifying examination being developed by the NBEC for the AAVSB's new certification program for graduates of non-accredited schools. Ten content experts will offer comments on a draft blueprint for the new examination, then spend the rest of the time evaluating items dealing with basic science or pre-clinical subject matter. Proposed content areas for the new examination include anatomy, physiology, pharmacology, microbiology, pathology, and miscellaneous, which includes principles of surgery, anesthesiology and radiology, as well as animal behavior, reproduction, nutrition, public health, food safety, toxicology, and epidemiology.

Present plans call for the development a 300 item multiple

choice examination. The examination will be offered on a common date twice each year at computer testing centers, beginning next August. As with the NAVLE, a portion of the items on the qualifying examination will include graphics.



NBEC Past Chair
Dr. R.B. Baker



NBEC Chair-elect Dr. Norman LaFauce and
Chair Dr. Nancy Collins

NBEC Meets in San Diego

The NBEC will meet Saturday, January 20, in San Diego. The AAVSB Executive Committee will meet at the same location on Sunday, January 20. Individuals interested in more information on the NBEC meeting should contact the NBEC office.

Test Accommodations: Who, Why, and How

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires licensing boards to provide reasonable test accommodations to candidates with documented disabilities.

Responsibility for determining the nature of the disability and whether accommodations are appropriate rests with the individual licensing board. The NAVLE Candidate Bulletin states, "If you have a documented disability covered under the ADA, and require test accommodations, contact the licensing board to obtain information regarding procedures and documentation requirements before you apply for the NAVLE. All accommodations must be approved by the licensing board and the NBEC." The NAVLE application form asks candidates to indicate if they have a documented disability and will request accommodations.

Documentation is the key. It is the candidate's responsibility to submit documentation to the licensing board that indicates the nature of the disability (the diagnosis), what accommodations

are requested, and why these accommodations are necessary. The board is responsible for reviewing the documentation, determining that the candidate is in fact disabled and covered under the ADA, and that the accommodations requested are reasonable and appropriate.

The NBEC's agreement with licensing boards requires boards to consult with the NBEC before approving accommodations. The NBEC's role is to ensure that the requested accommodations "do not place the security of the examination in jeopardy or alter the examination in such a way as to affect its validity, defensibility or ability to assess minimum competence."

Common accommodations include additional time, frequent breaks, a separate testing room, and, in certain cases, a reader. All Prometric centers are accessible to candidates in wheelchairs.

Because the NAVLE is given at established testing centers, even the standard administration provides a quiet environment free of significant distractions. In addition, the NAVLE is structured in six blocks of 60 items, and candidates are free to take breaks between

blocks (at least 45 minutes total break time is available during the 7.5 hour examination). This allows candidates time to stretch, take a walk, eat, drink, go to the restroom, or take medication. This flexibility has allowed us to handle several requests without providing special accommodations.

The process should be a cooperative one, involving the candidate, the board, the NBEC, and our test vendor. The goal is to provide reasonable accommodations to candidates with documented disabilities, without giving such candidates an unfair advantage over non-disabled candidates. Accommodations on licensing examinations should have the goal of "leveling the playing field" so that disabled candidates have a fair and equal opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and skill.

Candidates approved for accommodations receive a special scheduling permit and number to call to schedule their examination.

The NBEC can use the resources of the NBME and other organizations in handling unique requests.

Setting the Record Straight

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The NBEC has gone to great lengths to ensure that every item on the NAVLE is relevant to entry level private clinical practice. Items dealing with basic science areas (anatomy or physiology, for example) are included only if they are considered important for competent private clinical practice.

The ECFVG's requirement that candidates from non-accredited schools pass the national licensing examination as part of the ECFVG program creates two problems. First, it is confusing to candidates for the NAVLE to be one of the steps of the ECFVG program. All other licensure candidates are eligible for licensure once they pass the licensing examination(s), but ECFVG candidates cannot apply for a license until they also complete step 4 of the ECFVG program (either passing the Clinical Proficiency Examination (CPE) or completing a year of evaluated clinical experience at an accredited veterinary school after

graduation). Second, including the licensing examination in the certification program creates the false impression that the ECFVG program measures educational equivalence. As indicated above, the ECFVG program does not measure competence in basic science areas.

Unlike the ECFVG program, the new certification program for graduates of non-accredited veterinary schools being established by the American Association of Veterinary State Boards (AAVSB) will address the area of educational equivalence by requiring all candidates to pass a new qualifying examination being developed by the NBEC. The qualifying examination will be designed to measure knowledge taught in the first three years of the veterinary curriculum, including many areas that are not covered on the NAVLE. In other words, a candidate's knowledge of basic science or pre-clinical areas will finally be assessed as a part of

the certification program for graduates of non-accredited schools.

The AAVSB's program also solves the sequencing problem mentioned above by removing the NAVLE as a requirement of the certification program. After graduates of non-accredited schools receive their certificate, indicating that they have met the educational equivalence requirements, they will then take the NAVLE like all other licensure candidates from accredited schools.

In summary, the NBE, CCT, and NAVLE are licensing examinations. That is what they were designed for, and that is what they should be used for. Assessment of knowledge in basic science areas requires the use of an examination developed for that purpose.

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