

## Preparing for the Hospice and Palliative Medicine Certification Examination

DALE E. LUPU, M.P.H., Ph.D., LAURA G. DAVIS, B.A., and SALLY WEIR

PHYSICIANS PREPARING TO SIT for the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) Hospice and Palliative Medicine (HPM) board examination on October 29, 2008 want to use their study time efficiently and effectively. The following compilation of suggestions and resources is offered by the American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine (AAHPM) to help with the process of board examination preparation.

AAHPM is not involved in the development of the ABMS examination. However, the following suggestions, drawn from the Academy's expertise in HPM continuing education, should help physicians develop their own individualized plan of approach to preparing for the examination:

1. **Become familiar with examination content and blueprint**—The American Board of Internal Medicine (ABIM) has posted the HPM certification examination blueprint, which includes the content areas covered, their relative percentages, and the approximate number of questions in each area to expect on a typical examination. To view the examination content and blueprint, go to [www.abim.org/exam/cert/hospice.aspx](http://www.abim.org/exam/cert/hospice.aspx).
2. **Take the sample tutorial**—On the ABIM website, there is a sample tutorial that will help familiarize you with the look and feel of the computerized testing process. To take the tutorial, go to [www.abim.org/exam/prepare.aspx](http://www.abim.org/exam/prepare.aspx).
3. **Review textbooks**—There are many good hospice and palliative medicine text books that provide a comprehensive, advanced overview of the specialty and will help you understand the breadth and depth of various content areas. A list of specialty texts that had formerly been recommended by the American Board of Hospice and Palliative Medicine for review purposes may be found on the AAHPM website at [www.aahpm.org/certification/resources.html](http://www.aahpm.org/certification/resources.html).

The *Hospice and Palliative Care Training for Physicians: UNIPAC Self-Study Program, 3rd edition* provides a good introduction to the field of hospice and palliative medicine. The series has been completely revised and consists of nine self-study books that may be ordered individually or as a complete set. These introductory level texts are designed to orient the reader to the field, but are not sufficient by themselves to serve as comprehensive review for the examination and should be supplemented by further study of one or more specialty level comprehensive texts. To purchase the UNIPACs, visit the Academy website at [www.aahpm.org](http://www.aahpm.org).

4. **Take an online course**—Several comprehensive online courses are available. Content in many of these leans toward the introductory level rather than the subspecialty level. Nevertheless, working through an organized curriculum at one's own pace can be a helpful study approach.
  - *Education in Palliative and End-of-Life Care for Oncology*. Commonly known as *EPEC™-O*, this CD-ROM is a comprehensive curriculum in palliative and end-of-life care developed specifically for clinicians caring for persons with cancer. It can be ordered at [www.cancer.gov/aboutnci/epeco](http://www.cancer.gov/aboutnci/epeco). Other EPEC workshops and online learning tools are available at the EPEC Project website, [www.epec.net/EPEC/Webpages/index.cfm](http://www.epec.net/EPEC/Webpages/index.cfm).
  - *Stanford End-of-Life Care Curriculum for Medical Teachers, Stanford University*. The Stanford Faculty Development Center (SFDC) (<http://sfdc.stanford.edu/>) developed a 16-hour faculty development course incorporating basic material designed to be used by physicians in any area of expertise. This Web-based course is an adaptation of materials developed for that course.

To learn more, visit ([www.growthhouse.org/stanford/index.html](http://www.growthhouse.org/stanford/index.html)).

5. **Remain up-to-date**—Continue to keep abreast of the current evidence in the field. AAHPM provides several ways for physicians to keep informed:

- *Fast Facts*—free one-page summaries of 195 critical topics in hospice and palliative medicine. *Fast Facts* are peer-reviewed, evidence-based, and can be searched using keywords, author, title, and purpose. They are a good place to search when looking for resources on a specific topic. To learn more, visit ([www.aahpm.org/resources/index.html](http://www.aahpm.org/resources/index.html)).
- *PC-FACS (Fast Article Critical Summaries for Clinicians in Palliative Care)*, offered by the Academy, is a monthly electronic publication providing palliative care clinicians with concise summaries of important findings from more than 30 medical and scientific journals and is a benefit of membership in AAHPM. These articles can also be searched on the AAHPM website by title, author, keywords, or journal name. CME is available. ([www.aahpm.org/membership/pcfacs.html](http://www.aahpm.org/membership/pcfacs.html)).
- *Palliative Care Journal Club*. Join at (<http://journalclub.pallcare.info/index.php?page=about>).

6. **Attend a review course**—A popular course offered by the Academy is the *Current Concepts in Palliative Care: Update and Review Course*. This course provides a thorough review of the current practice of palliative medicine, including clinical advancements and research updates. The purpose of the course is to improve the quality of patient care by preparing physicians and other health care providers to integrate palliative care into all health care for serious or life-threatening conditions and

to ensure that pain and symptom control, psychosocial distress, spiritual issues, and practical needs are addressed with patients and their families throughout the continuum of care.

AAHPM is also exploring opportunities for creating an enduring product that will be available within a few weeks of the course.

7. **Take the practice test**—The *Hospice and Palliative Medicine Physician Assessment & Self Study Tool (HPM PASS)* is a new online practice test offered by the Academy. It includes 150 test questions to help assess your knowledge in key areas of hospice and palliative medicine and uncover areas where additional review may be helpful. An answer key provides explanations of the right and wrong answers and key references for further study. To see a demonstration of the product and learn more, visit ([www.aahpm.org/physresources/hpmpassdemo.html](http://www.aahpm.org/physresources/hpmpassdemo.html)).
8. **Stay current with the rules and logistics for taking the examination**—Read carefully everything that you receive from your primary board concerning instructions for registering for the examination. As new information on the ABMS certification process is learned, it will be posted on the Academy's website at ([www.aahpm.org/certification/abms.html](http://www.aahpm.org/certification/abms.html)). Be sure to check back regularly or contact the Academy with questions at 847-375-4712.

Address reprint request to:

Dale E. Lupu, Ph.D.  
American Academy of Hospice  
and Palliative Medicine  
4700 West Lake Avenue  
Glenview, IL 60025-1485

Email: [dlupu@abhpm.org](mailto:dlupu@abhpm.org)

The first American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) subspecialty certification examination in hospice and palliative medicine is scheduled for October 29, 2008. The certification program has been developed by 10 cosponsoring boards including the American Boards of Anesthesiology, Internal Medicine, Family Medicine, Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, Psychiatry and Neurology, Surgery, Pediatrics, Emergency Medicine, Radiology, and Obstetrics and Gynecology. The examination will be administered by the American Board of Internal Medicine (ABIM) and offered to candidates of all Boards at the same time and in the same testing centers (Pearson VUE Testing Centers). Candidates will register for the certification examination through the primary board by which they are certified and each board is responsible for developing its own application materials. Subsequent exams will be offered every other year, i.e., 2010, 2012, 2014, etc.