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Focus on Residents

Why Can't the ABR Deliver Diagnostic Radiology Exams at Local Testing Centers?

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by ABR Trustee Donald J. Flemming, MD, and David J. Laszakovits, MBA

Delivering our exams at local commercial testing centers has been a recurring topic of conversation for many years. It's impossible for us not to appreciate your discontent about incurring the added cost for travel and the stress of being away from families and training programs. We take this very seriously and are working hard to find more manageable solutions.



To that end, I'd like to share a little about what we're trying to accomplish, the unique features of the exams, and the obstacles we've faced attempting to secure a commercial testing vendor to deliver our diagnostic radiology initial certification exams.

“Proctored and Secured”

At the most fundamental level, we—and any other high-stakes testing organization—must achieve several basic exam delivery elements to ensure that our initial certification processes meet best practice standards. Perhaps the most important standard is that the exam be “proctored and secure.”

Almost without exception, all exams used to evaluate professional performance, such as the SAT, MCAT, and USMLE, require the testing environment to be proctored and secured, which ensures the overall fidelity of the exam administration. This alone dramatically limits the viable options for exam delivery.

Unique Features of Exams in Diagnostic Radiology

In addition to this basic necessity, delivering an exam to assess the clinical competencies required to practice diagnostic radiology presents a number of other challenges. Because of the

nature of practice, the most appropriate way to present diagnostic radiology exam material is through clinical vignettes that have a patient history, a question to be answered, multimedia content, and answer options. As you know, the multimedia content usually includes several high-resolution images or a video file.

These delivery requirements have proven to be insurmountable obstacles for the numerous commercial testing vendors that we've engaged over the years. It's important to remember that the vast majority of these vendors' clients deliver text-based question exams with little or no multimedia content.

Our Recent Attempts to Engage Commercial Vendors

For almost a decade, we've sought the services of numerous local commercial testing vendors for the delivery of our exams. We've been successful in securing a vendor for delivering our radiation oncology and medical physics exams solely because they are text-based with little or no multimedia content.

Unfortunately, we've not been able to do the same for our diagnostic radiology exams; however, that is not for lack of trying. Just last year, we engaged two prominent commercial testing vendors to explore our goal of delivering the diagnostic radiology initial certification exams at local testing centers. Both vendors were given in-depth details of our exam delivery needs and asked to provide a proposal for our consideration.

Vendor #1 very diligently reviewed our requirements with its team for several months, but in the end declined to provide a proposal. The stated reason was that even our basic exam delivery requirements demanded too many modifications of their current delivery processes and workflows. This was primarily attributed to large multimedia content file sizes. Something else not said, but implied, was that our small delivery volume (~3,000 exams annually) was not significant enough to justify the required cost to take on our needs.

We participated in a similar process with Vendor #2, convening numerous conference calls and preparing detailed specifications over a period of several months. After the discovery period was complete, we waited patiently for the results of analysis and hoped for a proposal. Unfortunately, this wasn't meant to be. After dozens of unanswered phone calls and emails over a period of more than 90 days, we never received a proposal or any reason why.

If at First You Don't Succeed . . .

We are committed to making the initial certification process as facile as possible. While our past efforts have not been successful, we will continue to pursue our goal (and your wish) of delivering diagnostic radiology exams in local commercial testing centers. As we all know, technology is constantly evolving, and perhaps local exam delivery will become more feasible in the future.