



American Academy of Health Physics
American Board of Health Physics

Corner

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ABMP MHP Certification

Jean M. St. Germain, CHP, DABMP

As Chair of the Medical Health Physics panel for the American Board of Medical Physics (ABMP) and as a member of the American Board of Health Physics (ABHP), I welcome the opportunity to respond to the questions raised in the contribution from Lester Slaback that appeared in the March 1995 "CHP Corner" as well as the opportunity to acquaint the CHP community and the HPS membership with the programs of the ABMP. The ABMP is a relatively new specialty board founded in 1989. ABMP had a period of inaugural certification that closed in 1991. During the inaugural period, people certified by either the American Board of Radiology (ABR) or the ABHP could receive certification by the ABMP by application to that Board. The applicant needed to satisfy the clinical/medical experience and training requirements of the ABMP and supply appropriate letters of recommendation. Approximately twenty physicists, including me, elected the Medical Health Physics (MHP) specialty. The ABHP had a similar inaugural period at the time of its founding. After the close of the inaugural period, certification could only be achieved through examination. The examination process of the ABMP is a three-tier system and the candidate must pass all three sections.

Part I of the ABMP exam is a general examination in all areas of medical physics and does not necessarily require professional experience. A master's degree is the minimum educational requirement. These requirements are more stringent than the entrance requirements for the ABHP Part I. Whether these requirements lead to a higher pass rate is conjectural.

Part II of the ABMP exam is a specialty examination. The specialty exams require certain educational and clinical/medical experience requirements, including letters of endorsement from a certified physicist and a certified physician. Graduate degrees require from one to four years

of clinical experience depending on the graduate degree and whether or not the candidate graduated from an AAPM-accredited program. The MHP specialty examination was given for the first time in 1994. It is too early to predict accurately the number of candidates who will ultimately take the examination; however, there are approximately 20 additional MHP candidates in the pipeline as of 1995. The total number of people certified by the ABMP is approaching 400, with an additional 300 or so people in various stages of the certification process.

Part III is an oral examination lasting approximately two hours, administered by a panel of four examiners. The first oral exams in the MHP specialty were given in April 1995. The oral exam is designed to determine the depth of the candidate's experiential knowledge and fitness to practice in a designated specialty area. Admission to the oral examination requires from two to six years experience past the graduate degree, depending on the degree and whether or not the candidate graduated from an AAPM-accredited program. The candidate must receive a passing score in all sections to pass the exam. If a candidate fails three or more of the eight sections of the examination, he/she must re-take the entire oral exam. If a candidate fails one or two sections of the examination, the candidate must re-take only those failed sections of the exam in a one-hour oral.

In my discussions of the ABMP with members of the ABHP, I have pointed out that, in my opinion, people practicing in the medical environment may ultimately prefer certification by the ABMP. There are a number of reasons for this: candidates working only in medicine may lack the experience in environmental monitoring and power reactors required for ABHP comprehensive health physics certification; the ABMP certification may be more recognizable in the medical physics community; the ABHP has stated that it will not create any new specialty exams; and the ABHP exam may not test the depth of knowledge necessary for a specialty in MHP. While the numbers of people certified in MHP will never approach the numbers of people certified in other areas of medical physics, the ABMP is confident that this specialty will contribute substantially to its program. The ABMP welcomes comments on its program. Comments can be addressed to me or to Dr. N. Suntharalingam, Chair of the ABMP.

1996 ABHP Certification Exam

Applications for the 1996 ABHP Certification Exam must be postmarked no later than 15 January 1996. For information, contact Nancy Johnson, Program Director, AAHP Secretariat, 1313 Dolley Madison Blvd., Suite 402, McLean, VA 22101.

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