American Dental Association: Understanding Licensure

Checklist for Licensure Candidates

- Select patients:
  - Do patients meet all criteria?
  - Make sure patients are familiar with exam process and time commitment.
  - Tip: Provide patients with the ADA’s brochure: A Patient’s Guide to the Clinical Licensure Examination, found on ADA.org.

- Research where and when you want to take the exam:
  - Especially important for students whose state accepts more than one state/regional exam and/or whose school offers a pre-graduation exam.
  - What date and location is best for you and your patients?

- Make travel and lodging arrangements for you and your patients:
  - Confirm your reservation(s) a few days before exam.
  - Don’t forget about lunch/snacks.

- Verify if malpractice/liability insurance is needed:
  - If insurance is provided, research that the coverage is appropriate.
  - If not provided, obtain insurance several weeks in advance of exam day.

- Complete and mail/submit application, making sure to include all supporting documents.

- Know your candidates’ guide:
  - Don’t forget to bring it with you to the exam.

- Research programs that will help you prepare and study for your exam:
  - Mock boards, lunch & learns are examples.
  - Your state and local dental society may offer assistance.

- Confirm patient and assistant participation:
  - Give your patients clear instructions in writing, including all the logistics (i.e. location, time, etc) and confirm verbally.
  - Plan to meet with your patients immediately before exam to ensure promptness.
  - If you’re using an assistant, be sure to clearly communicate with him/her as well.

- Develop a schedule for exam day.

- Prepare supplies and equipment for exam day.

The Moment You’ve Been Waiting For—The Results

Notification

There is a wide variability in the time it takes for a candidate to receive notification of his or her status from the testing agency. It may take as little as three weeks or as long as eight weeks. The information provided also varies. Candidates who do not pass the exam often indicate that the notice they receive does not give them enough information to understand what they did wrong or to determine if an appeal would be appropriate.

Curriculum Integrated Format: Your candidates guide should outline if the timeframes for score release under CIF.

- Tip: Testing agencies may not (and will not) share score reports with the candidate over the phone, by fax or e-mail. Some agencies will release scores on their Web sites, a secure, personalized log-in for candidates is required in these cases.

Appeals

Clinical exam candidates may appeal their results. Although there are limited data available on candidates’ success on appeal, anecdotes from new dentists who did appeal are not encouraging. The length of time it takes to complete an appeal can also be problematic—it may take as long as 90 days from the receipt of the appeal request. Therefore, if the appeal is lengthy or not successful, candidates have prolonged the time it takes to begin their practice. Additionally, be aware that there may be a limited window (as early as 14 days) to submit your appeal after scores are received—so if you want to appeal, don’t delay. Review the appeals process ahead of time so you know what to expect.

Often, candidates cannot apply for reexamination and appeal their exam failure concurrently. For some testing agencies, registering for reexamination terminates the appeal process. This can serve to further discourage licensure candidates from filing an appeal.

With the WREB, for example, if a candidate successfully completes another examination while his or her appeal is under evaluation, that appeal will be automatically dropped. If a subsequent examination is failed, the appeal process will continue to completion and a decision rendered without the Appeal Committee’s knowledge of the candidate’s performance on that examination. It’s essential to contact the testing agency to evaluate your options.

Impact on the recent graduate

When it comes to licensure, the recent graduate faces a daunting task. Even dentists who plan to practice in the state where they received their dental education find challenges. Faculty may not be knowledgeable about the licensure examination in that state. For the graduates who plan to practice in another state, there is even more uncertainty about whether strong school performance will lead to successful completion of the exam. It is not uncommon for recent graduates to take the licensure examination for multiple states to enhance the likelihood for success.

This uncertainty also can make it difficult to forge professional relationships. For those entering associationship or employment arrangements, all negotiations are contingent upon the successful completion of the exam. New dentists who plan to acquire practices or launch a new practice know that their financing and future career success hinges on licensure.

Plus, up to one-third of new dentists relocate within their first 10 years of practice—so there is a possibility that new graduates will have to face this all again in the near future! Licensure by credentials has made transfer easier in some areas, but each state has its own experience requirements before licensure is considered. For dual career couples, especially where both members are dentists, these difficulties are only compounded.

The impact of failure

Failure to achieve dental licensure can be devastating. Socially, as those who make it move on with their lives, those who do not, are left in limbo. Psychologically, those who fail can begin to feel like “failures.” And financially, well-laid plans must be put on hold and alternative employment options are slim.

As noted earlier, the cost for taking the exam includes the application and fees, which range from $150 to nearly $2,000, plus travel costs for both you and your selected patients. Paying that expense twice can make a deep dent in your bank account—especially if employment options are scarce. It’s important to note the frequency at which your region or state offers the exam so you can be prepared physically, psychologically, and financially.