

Date: May 20, 2016
To: Deans of Dental Schools
Ms. Nancy Honeycutt, Executive Director, American Student Dental Association
From: Dr. Luis J. Fujimoto, Chair, Joint Commission on National Dental Examinations
Subject: Important Note on Test Security and the National Board Examinations

The National Board Examinations are designed for use by state dental boards to determine whether candidates for licensure possess the necessary cognitive skills and abilities to enter the profession and safely practice dentistry. These examinations play an important role in protecting the health of the public. Test security violations threaten the validity of these examination programs and the purpose for which they were designed. Consequently, the Joint Commission on National Dental Examinations takes matters of test security very seriously.

In 2015, the Joint Commission supported the creation of two new positions in the Department of Testing Services (DTS), to focus in this area (Manager, Test Security and Fraud Prevention; Lead, Test Security & Fraud Prevention Specialist). DTS was fortunate to identify two highly qualified individuals to fill these roles, one of whom has over 20 years of investigative experience with the CIA. The focus of these positions rests primarily in three areas: 1) educate candidates on issues and concerns involving examination conduct, 2) build strong policies and procedures to prevent, identify, and address security threats, and 3) conduct investigations involving security threats and rule violations.

In accordance with its Bylaws duties, the Joint Commission is obligated to take action to protect examination content and the integrity of its testing programs. In considering matters of test security, the Joint Commission relies on established examination regulations which are reviewed annually and communicated via testing program examination guides. Candidates must agree to these conditions in order to complete the examinations. With respect to the sharing of unreleased examination content, the following Rule of Conduct from the NBDE Part II Guide is relevant:

4. You will maintain the confidentiality of the examination. You will not reproduce or attempt to reproduce examination materials through memorization, recording, or other means. You will not provide information relating to current examination content that might impact the examination's ability to accurately reflect candidate skills, or that might provide unfair advantage to other candidates. For example, you will neither make use of nor participate in the electronic posting or other distribution of information regarding examination content or answers. (p26)

The Joint Commission's actions in response to violations are also indicated in the guides. A relevant excerpt from the NBDE Part II Guide is as follows:

The NBDE Part II is a secure examination that is protected by U.S. copyright laws. Any unauthorized disclosure of the examination's contents could result in civil liability, criminal penalties, voiding of examination results or other appropriate penalty.

Thus, in accordance with its mission and information presented in candidate guides, the Joint Commission is conducting investigations to identify security threats on social networking sites and wherever those threats might be found. Those investigations are carefully and professionally conducted to identify and address violations. The Joint Commission is by no means suggesting that candidates should remove themselves from participation on Facebook and other social networking sites. As candidates for licensure—and in recognition of candidate goals to become future dental professionals—it behooves candidates to behave ethically and exercise caution when choosing to participate in groups or activities where violations are occurring. Procedures are also in place to provide candidates with an opportunity to appeal Joint Commission decisions.

In short, the Joint Commission pursues activities to deter rule violations and address those violations when they are identified. This is done to preserve the integrity of Joint Commission examination programs so the programs function as intended. Candidates should carefully read the examination guides. These guides carefully explain which activities are permissible—before, during, and after test administration—and which are not. DTS is also currently working with ADEA to provide sessions on test security at upcoming ADEA conferences, to further inform programs and candidates on information available in currently published materials.

Respectfully yours,



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