

## Tips for Success! Preparing for a Board Certification Exam

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## Learning Objectives

- State the domains of practice that will be tested on the BCPS examination.
- Develop a comprehensive strategy to prepare for the board certification examination.
- Use best practices for test taking to maximize your score on the BPS board certification examination.



## ASHP Pharmacotherapy Examination Review Course

- LIVE Complex Cases (16 hours)
  - Complex HIV/AIDS
  - Cardiovascular Disease: Primary Prevention
  - Cardiovascular Disease: Secondary Prevention 1 & 2
  - Complex Breast Cancer
  - Complex Pediatric Asthma
  - Medication Safety
  - Regulatory and Quality Issues
  - Complex Nursing Home
  - Complex Pneumonia
- Research Design, Methodology, Statistical Analysis, and Application



## ASHP Pharmacotherapy Examination Review Course

- Core Therapeutic Modules (16 Hours)
  - Bone, Joint, and Rheumatology
  - Cardiac Arrhythmias and Advanced Cardiac Life Support
  - Congestive Heart Failure
  - Diabetes
  - Pharmacotherapy Considerations in the Management of HIV/AIDS
  - Select Topics in Infectious Diseases
  - Select Topics in Men's/Women's Health
  - Select Topics in Neurologic Disorders
  - Nutrition, Fluid, and Electrolytes
  - Select Topics in Psychiatric Disorders
  - Case Studies in Nausea/Vomiting and Inflammatory Bowel Disease
  - Pharmacotherapy Considerations in the Management of Shock
  - Statistics, Evidence-Based Medicine, and Clinical Trial Design



*How NOT to prepare for the exam....*



## The BPS Examination

- Role delineation survey defines exam content
  - Identifies common/unique tasks, skills, and knowledge possessed by specialists in the defined area of practice
  - Content themes are grouped in “domains”
  - Content weight based on percent of time
- Questions
  - Items written by peers
  - Items are reviewed, classified, and validated
  - Items are selected for the exam from a large pool based on weight

## Pharmacotherapy

*Pharmacotherapy ensures the safe, appropriate and economical use of medications as part of interprofessional treatment teams in a variety of settings, including hospitals and health systems*

## BPS Pharmacotherapy Domains

- Domain 1: Patient-Specific Pharmacotherapy  
55%
- Domain 2: Drug Information and Evidence-Based Medicine  
25%
- Domain 3: Systems-Based Standards and Population-Based Pharmacotherapy  
20%

## Applicant Qualifications

- Exam is intended to validate knowledge and skills already possessed by a specialist
- Minimum qualifications
  - Graduation from ACPE-accredited pharmacy school
  - Current, active licensure to practice pharmacy in the U.S. or another jurisdiction
  - Experience (or specialized training) in the area of specialization
- Pharmacotherapy
  - Completion of 3 years of post-licensure practice experience with at least 50% of time spent in pharmacotherapy activities
  - OR
  - Completion of PGY-1 residency

## Application Dates

- Two application and examination windows

Spring	Fall
Apply in January - March	Apply in May-July
Test Dates Mid-April to Mid-May	Test Dates Mid-September to Mid-October

## Recertification

- Maintain certification over 7 year period
  - Achieve a passing score on 100-item recertification exam in 7<sup>th</sup> year
  - OR
  - Earn 120 hours of continuing education credit by program approved by BPS
- AND
- Pay annual certification fee and recertification fee in 7<sup>th</sup> year

## Preparing for the Exam

- Recommendation #1
  - Do a critical self-evaluation regarding your knowledge, skills, training, and experiences
  - Are you a well-qualified pharmacy specialist?
- Recommendation #2
  - Identify the gaps in your knowledge
  - What is (are) likely to be your weakest area(s) on the exam?

## Preparing for the Exam

- Recommendation #3
  - Take a board certification preparatory course!
  - Helps you to self-evaluate and plan for future study
- Recommendation #4
  - Develop a self-study plan
  - Create a written plan with a timeline and topics you plan to review

## Preparing for the Exam

- Recommendation #5
  - Find a study partner - teach each other!
  - Accountability to your partner will keep you on track
- Recommendation #6
  - Set priority areas that require more attention
  - Spend more time studying your areas of weakness
  - Study a mixture of related concepts during each session
  - Concentrate on common diseases and practice-related issues

## Preparing for the Exam

- Recommendation #7
  - Create an atmosphere conducive to study but vary the locations!
    - Time of day when you are most alert
    - Comfortable surroundings
    - Minimize distractions
- Recommendation #8
  - Make notes while studying. Write down key points or facts you think might be tested on the exam.

## Preparing for the Exam

- Recommendation #9
  - Sleep!
  - Eat healthy
  - Exercise regularly
  - Spend some time relaxing every 7 days
- Recommendation #10
  - Believe in yourself!
  - Anxiety is counter-productive ... take deep breaths and meditate!

## Study Materials

- Get lots of practice with a mixture of realistic, rigorous questions
- Whether you get the answer right or wrong, learn from and about the underlying principles

## Study Materials

- Direct Patient Care Topics
  - Latest edition of a therapeutics text book
  - Clinical practice guidelines (executive summary)
  - Concise review articles
- Specific content areas
  - Web-based resources (see prep course recommendations)

## Study Materials

- *Pharmacotherapy: A Pathophysiologic Approach (10<sup>th</sup> Ed)*
- Practice / Population Management
  - *How to Develop a Business Plan for Pharmacy Services (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)* by Schumock and Stubbings
  - *Pharmacoeconomics and Outcomes: Applications for Patient Care (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)* by Grauer, Lee, and Odom

## Best Practices in Exam Preparation

- Re-read the candidate's guide the day before the exam
  - Make certain you have your government-issued ID and printed copy of admission ticket ready to go
  - Note the exam time and location (get directions!)
  - Set your alarm clock
- Get a good night of sleep (9 hours) ... and avoid sleep-aids or alcohol!
- Plan to arrive 30 minutes early and use the restroom before the exam

## Best Practices in Exam Preparation

- The exam shouldn't be a surprise:
  - Questions will be on seemingly random topics but all domains will be tested in the weights assigned by BPS.
  - There will be questions you don't know the answers. GUESS!
  - There will be questions which appear to have more than one right answer. GUESS!
- Exam Part 1 = 100 questions
- Exam Part 2 = 75 questions

## Best Practices in Exam Preparation

- How to Guess on the Exam
  - Look for answer options that may stand out (i.e., length/detail are different from other options)
  - Try to eliminate answer options you know are incorrect
  - Look for answer options that are mutually exclusive

## Best Practices in Exam Preparation

- If you encounter a particularly difficult question, GUESS the answer, "flag" it for follow-up, and move on ... don't spend >3 minutes agonizing over one question!
- DO NOT leave any questions unanswered
- If you have time, go back to those questions you "flagged" and recheck your answers for silly mistakes ... but don't second guess yourself

## Best Practices in Exam Preparation

- Take a break between Parts 1 and 2 of the exam
- During the break, eat some food and drink some fluid, use the bathroom, and try not to reminisce about the first half of the exam
- After the exam, go out to dinner with your (non-pharmacy) friends!

### After the Exam

- BPS will analyze the exam results including the performance of individual items on the exam
- Raw scores are scaled every year based on the exam difficulty. The actual number of questions needed to “pass” varies from year to year.
- The scaled score “cut point” (pass vs. fail) is 500 points out of 800 possible points.
- Pass/fail notifications are typically sent 6-8 weeks after the last exam is administered.