

2020 Qualifying Exam Q&A for Residency Program Directors and Managers

Webinar held on May 11, 2020

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GW – Dr. George Wendel

WL – Dr. Wilma Larsen

GW: Good afternoon. My name is George Wendel. I'm the Executive Director at the American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology, and I want to welcome you to our afternoon virtual conference to talk about the Qualifying Exams coming up at the end of June.

We appreciate you taking time out of your busy schedules of program administration and clinical care to talk with us.

I'm joined by Dr. Wilma Larsen, our Associate Executive Director in charge of examinations, and Cariel Apodaca is also on the line, who manages our subspecialties.

I wanted to follow up with you from our prior virtual meeting a couple of weeks ago to let you know where we are and what options we're exploring and to thank you for your feedback on the initial survey that was sent out to help us gain some information.

Wilma, would you like to give them an update on what's happening with Pearson VUE?

WL: Yes, George. All of you should know that Pearson VUE is going to determine which candidates will lose their seats for the exams, both to specialty and subspecialty, next week, Monday and Tuesday. I believe that the last time we met, we explained that we don't have any say in that process, unfortunately.

We are considered high priority as a medical board, but we don't have the authority to say, "Well these people should get to take the exam, or these people shouldn't". It's going to be completely random. 50% of the June seats on both the 26th and 29th will be eliminated. Those

candidates that lose their seats will be contacted by Pearson VUE next week to let them know that that's happened.

We are still working with Pearson VUE, looking at as many options as we can come up with to try to determine how can we maximize the number of candidates that could possibly take the exam. In addition to the June date, as we've told you in our last time we got together, we are going to have a second date for both the specialty and subspecialty. We hope that will be in the late-summer, early-fall time frame. We do, unfortunately, not have that date yet from Pearson VUE.

We also are looking at potentially opening up what are called authorized Pearson VUE centers. Right now, when you take your Qualifying Exam, you take that at a Pearson-owned center. Pearson also has authorized centers that they have contracts with that do administer exams, but we have not used those in the past. We're looking at whether or not we can use those centers and if that would increase the number of candidates that could take the exam both in June and later in the year on the alternate date.

As you know, hopefully because we sent out the survey, we're also looking at the possibility of doing client proctored exams, which would be where someone from your institution proctors your candidates for the Specialty or Subspecialty Qualifying Exam in June being administered at your institution.

We're looking at all these potential options to try and maximize the number of people that will be able to take the exam. Our hope is that anyone that wants to the exam in 2020 will be able to do so.

GW: Thanks. I'm going to go through some of those points in a sort of stop-wise fashion and hope that you can help us work through this and devise some solutions.

The first thing that's most concerning is that Pearson VUE will be contacting those whose exams are cancelled next Monday and Tuesday. It's very important that your residents and candidates for the exam know to look in their email to see if they got a communication or not. It's our understanding they will not be contacting people if their scheduled exam is not cancelled.

We continue to work with them, and we will have communication to all the candidates to hopefully clarify some of this information for them. We don't want widespread panic and pandemonium to occur on Monday and Tuesday next week, but I'm going to presume if I get a letter that my exam's cancelled, it's going to be a very stressful situation for me because I've been studying for that. I may have been planning for that, and I just got that opportunity taken away from me.

We will have extra support staff ready to field questions. We are working internally to have information out for candidates who are cancelled to let them know what their options are and

how to move forward if they want to take the exam this year in June or if they want to take it at the alternate date in the fall when we know that date, or whether they would like to take it in 2021, and if it's an option to take it in a client proctored setting, how that would work out.

All of these things are in process right now, but we want to be really transparent that this is coming so you can begin to talk to our candidates and your residents to make sure they look at their email and make sure that they check and see that they haven't had their exam cancelled.

We're very concerned about Pearson VUE running at 50% capacity for the June dates, as well as they're going to be running at 50% capacity for the rest of the calendar year, which means that even the alternate date in the fall may be a challenge for some people to meet. We're very interested in your thoughts on our possibly delivering the exam to your facilities. To that extent, Dr. Larsen sent out a survey to you if you could proctor our examination in a very similar fashion to how you proctor the CREOG in-training exam each year.

It's my understanding that some of the attachments were really an internal attachment at our institution, so there should be another link that should take you to the documents that tell you about what our current status is and our interest in finding out if you might be able to be a remote site proctor for a group of your residents and candidates.

Why is there little or no mention of the combination of residency and fellowship testing within the same program?

GW: The reason for that is that contracts with test delivery companies are called events, and our event is one day for the OB GYN exam, and our event is another day for the certification exams. This separation was done based on old schedules that were compromised if all senior residents and fellows were absent from a clinical site to take an exam on the same day, and those dates were set up otherwise.

We have contracts with these companies, and there's no way to change those contracts at this point. They've scheduled based on those, and we can't change those. It may be something that we can change in the future, but for the present time, for capacity reasons, there's no way we can change that.

Please address the firewall issue mentioned in the Pearson VUE requirements since all our institutions have firewalls of some sort.

WL: The requirements for the organization are on the Pearson VUE website. We sent out a link to that, but we'll also post a link to that because apparently some people couldn't open that in the document that went out today, that allows you to look at what the requirements for your

organization are. That is why on the survey we said IT would need to be involved, because IT will need to be involved to discuss the issue of the firewall and how you administer the exam at your organization.

It is slightly hopeful that all of you are administering the CREOG exam with whatever firewall you have in place, because it's a similar process for most exam administration. That doesn't mean, however, that every organization or every institution would be able to administer the exam locally. That's part of why we're reaching to try and get as much information as possible to determine who can administer it and what issues they're going to run into.

We will post the link to the Pearson VUE website where you can go and look at those specific requirements, since apparently, like I said, some of you couldn't open that earlier today.

GW: Our hope is that having IT available means by phone and not necessarily on site when you're administering the exam. If all goes well with our approval of proctored sites, and the preliminary testing that you would do where you are, hopefully many of the IT issues could be resolved in advance and should not be an issue the day of the administration either on Friday or Monday.

We're still trying to figure out the feasibility of this as an option. We appreciate everybody sending the information in in the survey to give us a sense of whether this is something to pursue or not.

Our IT department could likely accommodate our residents taking the exam at our institution. However, there's a significant charge for downloading the software and using our computer lab. Who is responsible for these costs, given that these candidates have already paid ABOG for this exam?

WL: We're actually hoping that most of the exams could be given on individual laptops, either Mac or PC, so that the computer centers wouldn't have to be used. However, if there is a cost associated with having the IT people help with the downloading of software and those issues, we're going to examine that cost and try to determine what we as ABOG can do as far as that's concerned and the feasibility of administering this as the client proctored exam pending on the total cost.

We're not interested in having the candidates pay more than they've already paid for the examination. We just want to try to maximize the opportunities that they have in order to take the exam.

GW: I would think that the cost of using the testing center, we hope, would not be passed on to the candidate. That would be a departmental charge that could be submitted to us for reimbursement. We would not hopefully set up a system where a candidate would have to pay extra fees to take the exam in a hospital or institutional testing center. If you have that kind of cost information and could let us know, that would be important in our approval process as a site so we could figure out if it's feasible to offer the exams in your setting.

If we admit candidates other than our own to our exam center, how do we verify their identity?

GW: That would be something that would be provided in the proctoring manual. It's more identity verification. It would require a certain number of IDs, things that you would review before you authorize them to login and take the examination. Other than that, there would not be anything outside of that.

How many candidates will lose their seats?

GW: We were just informed by Pearson VUE this morning in an email that approximately 770 candidates will receive an email on Monday or Tuesday notifying them that their exams will be cancelled. That's roughly half of our candidates on those dates. We don't know anymore than that. We don't know how it's going to happen, as Dr. Larsen said, as far as the decision.

We have concerns that some people who may need accommodations may get those cancellations, and we're trying to figure out how one would reschedule and request accommodations in a new era where only 50% of the seats are available in a testing center.

Will candidates get any reimbursements if our institution hosts their exam?

GW: Sure. The reimbursement for costs is a separate issue, to some extent than the other part. We were planning on compensating those that do the proctoring for our exams.

WL: We are planning on reimbursing proctors for both specialty and subspecialty exams. There will be a small amount of training involved in that, as well as some administrative tasks that have to be performed ahead of time. We know that your time is valuable, so we're not unaware of that. We're planning to reimburse the proctor for each exam \$500. That'll be something that as we go forward, if we go forward with the client proctored, we'll be talking to each of the proctors at the institution to make sure that we can set that up.

I think I've covered the program or candidate reimbursement as far as if your institution is charging you, that's obviously a very difficult situation, and we do need as much information from all of you about that as possible so we can have an idea of how we go forward.

GW: If I can just highlight that the honorarium if you will to the proctor would be one for the Friday and one for the Monday, so not one for each of the subspecialty exams. We would hope that all the subspecialty exams could be aggregated and administered on the same day by the same proctor. There would be one institutional, one hospital, proctor for each of those two different days.

If there are any other fees that we're not aware of, if you would let us know offline, that would be really helpful too.

How likely will the client proctored exam become a reality? This seems to be a great solution for those facilities that have the capability to securely host the exam.

GW: That's why we sent out the survey this week to gauge the interest number one, and two, the capability, and three, the capacity to handle candidates.

One, you have to find out if there's interest. Two, can you do it, yes or no, given the IT structure and firewalls. Three, how big is your bandwidth to be able to handle the number of candidates.

We're very optimistic because you do the CREOG exam every year, and this would roughly be a quarter of the potential maximum that you could handle for a CREOG exam. We're very optimistic about it and hope to have an answer for you very soon.

I can tell you internally, we are moving forward with the exam partners we have to develop the capability on our end to be able to upload the exam into that web browser to administer that.

WL: We really hope that we'll be able to offer that. There are just a few things we don't know answers to yet that we will have to before we can know for certain.

Can you let us know when the cancellation email to candidates goes out in case it goes to the candidates junk mail?

GW: We will do our best to work on that issue. We have a communication strategy to go to all the residents because this clearly affects everybody. We are working on that. I think what we will have is some sort of internal system to make sure that we know that everybody got notified somehow, and then reach out to them with copies to Program Managers and Program

Directors to let you know about this, because this may be a situation where you've got to provide some support and assistance to people who have set up their whole schedule to take an exam at the end of June and now that whole part just got upended.

We'll do our best to work on that. As far as we know, the email's going out on Monday and Tuesday, and that's all we've been given notice, and that was nine o'clock this morning.

Will the cancellation emails be sent out on May 18th and 19th, and can candidates presume that if they haven't received an email that they're still scheduled?

GW: That will be part of our communication strategy, is how to reach out to those whose exams are cancelled, as well as those whose exams aren't cancelled. Certainly, those whose exams aren't cancelled still have the option to change and say I don't want to take it at the end of June for whatever reason. I want to take it in 2021. I want to take it in the fall of this year, or I want to cancel my exam at the Pearson VUE center and take it because my department is going to do a client proctored exam in the department classroom.

It's even a broader communication than that. We're trying to give options for things. We don't want people to feel like they have to take the exam on those dates if those dates are not good for them.

Will we have the running available times during the day? For example, if my test at 8 a.m. is cancelled, will I be able to sign up for a 10 a.m. slot that may be open?

GW: We actually asked that same question this morning. We do not have much knowledge about how the other times would be allocated or even available to our candidates. We're waiting for an answer from Pearson VUE on that. I wish I could tell you what that option is, but we don't know at this point.

WL: I would just add, George, that we have opened it up so that it no longer requires an 8 a.m. start time. In the past, our exams have all required an 8 a.m. start time, your local time. That has been removed. As George said, we don't know exactly how Pearson VUE is going to do it overall, but if there was a time slot available that a candidate could re-book into, we would not preclude that at this point. We've said that our candidates can book any time during that day. We have opened that up, we just don't know if that will be valuable or not.

GW: At one point, we thought they were going to cancel 50% of the start date and times that we had scheduled, and I think we were told the algorithm might be that all of the tests that day

will be pooled together, and 50% of them will be cancelled, which might give us more of an opportunity to have people take the exam, but the exam can be administered at different times during the day.

If their exam is cancelled, will they automatically be scheduled for the alternate date in the fall or will they be given the choice to do the fall option or the following year option?

GW: We had the same question earlier today. We don't have a fall date that they've offered us yet. We feel like we really can't answer that question as a candidate and decide this fall date is good for me without knowing what the fall date is, and I'm embarrassed, but they have not given us a fall date yet.

We actually asked them in the email today, "What's our fall date?" and we didn't get an answer yet.

How can we answer the survey if computer labs are still closed?

WL: It isn't a necessity to take the exam in a computer lab. The necessity are things like the machine, having an appropriate browser, and having an appropriate bandwidth of the internet that would be used. We're envisioning that there would be candidates that would be taking the exam in a conference room with appropriate social distancing and obviously appropriate distancing to prevent any kind of collusion, but not necessarily that everyone would take it in a computer lab.

Please go ahead and answer the survey. In the comments section for that question, you can say your computer lab is still closed. We would be very interested in knowing if you have an alternate space where your candidates could take it on a laptop.

When will we know if we will be a testing site?

GW: Soon. I think we really sent the survey to find out was there interest in this and capability, and the answer I think has been a pretty resounding yes. We will get together here and figure out how to move forward once Pearson VUE has said they can really deliver this examination for us using that model, and if we have to sign a new contract with them that stipulates how that would be administered and how we would be charged.

We hope to have that done this week, but I can't guarantee you that it will be this week. Luckily the exam is seven to eight weeks away, so we still have some time to execute this, but we're moving as fast as we can on this option.

How will the programs be notified if they're able to proctor their residents?

GW: Wilma's team will let them know.

WL: That's exactly right, George. We'll be reaching out to the sites individually.

It is possible that Pearson VUE sites will be closed in large cities in the northeast under state and local executive orders. Any thoughts regarding handling the candidates that are still scheduled to take exams at their original sites?

GW: That's precisely the reason why we have tried to come up with more options, knowing that some of them may not be taken and others may not be necessary now but may be necessary come the end of June.

The fall date is always an option. 2021 is an option. The client proctored exam, we hope will be an option in case the Pearson VUE centers are not open in your area. That's why we're trying to have every eventuality covered, and we've been scenario planning for that, and that was the impotence really to be honest to move forward with the client proctoring.

We also are going to maybe open up more of the Pearson contract sites so that you might be taking it at a center where your kids go for their math classes and where people go to take the GRE exams and things like that. But again, if those are closed due to local or state orders, that really doesn't help much at all. That's why we're moving forward as quickly as we can with the proctored exams.

The challenge with all of these things is that most of the companies need at least 60 days to get anything set up, and we're right on the 60 day limit. We and they are going to fast as they can to open up these options.

I have a resident who won't be finishing training before September so won't be able to take the exam in June. Would this person be able to take the exam in the fall?

WL: We've made a lot of accommodations for the Qualifying Exam, but if somebody is finishing their residency after the 30th of September, they wouldn't qualify to take the exam in this testing cycle, and the second date would be included in this testing cycle.

If they're finishing before the 30th of September, in September but before the 30th, then yes they would, but if they were finishing in October instead of before the 30th, then they wouldn't.

***Who would be responsible for administering the exam: Program Director, Program Manager?
Would this person have to be faculty?***

GW: I think our request on this will be flexible and hope to make it practical based on who could be available. We would hope it would be the Program Director or Program Manager or another trusted faculty member.

Prior to administering the CREOG in-service, our IT works this through with CREOG IT. Could we work this out ahead of time?

GW: That's our hope. It would actually have to be worked out ahead of time. There are some technical testing requirements. When you get the information with the link to the Pearson VUE site to give you general information, you go down and look at the bottom and it has Advanced Technical Settings. Click on that link and it will take you to a site where you can simply go in with any computer and test your internet capability and bandwidth to see if it might qualify and be able to go through their testing specifications.

That should give you a general idea. You can accomplish that yourself. It's probably very important to make sure you go through that with your IT people so that if you do want to apply to be a site, that you do have the capability and capacity to offer the exam.

If Pearson does not cancel a resident's exam, must they continue to take it at the assigned testing site? Will they only be able to change their site time/date if it is cancelled by Pearson VUE?

WL: That is not our plan. If we are able to do the client proctor and your residency/fellowship institution is a client proctored site, your candidates could take the exam there. They don't have to take it at the Pearson VUE center. They would be able to cancel their exam at Pearson VUE. They would need to let us know that because then we would have to do a re-authorization and they could be rescheduled to take it at your site.

We're not going to require people to take it at Pearson VUE if the client proctored exams go through and that residency is an approved site. That is not our plan whatsoever.

GW: They have the choice to take their exam at any time, too. They can cancel out of this exam and move it to next year. They can cancel out of the June scheduled date and ask to move it to another one. We'll have to work out those nuances over the next week or so.

If residents will be using their own computers, they will not be using the institutional secured system. How will that work?

GW: That's part of what I think we're asking you to work out and within a context of whatever your institutional requirements are decide whether you could administer this and where you could administer it.

If your institution allows people to bring in their own computers and access Wi-Fi and they could do that on their own computer and download the browser which opens up the exam, that would be the easiest and ideal way to do it. It's not required that they use institutional secured workstations or computers from our perspective.

WL: Just to add to that, if you don't mind George, the program that we would be using will actually lock down someone's laptop if they're going to take the exam, so the only thing they'll be able to do is take the exam at that time. They won't be able to go to the internet or go to any other programs or processes. That security is actually provided through the exam process.

As far as the emails that will be sent by Pearson VUE on May 18th and 19th, will only the candidates who are cancelled get that email?

GW: From Pearson VUE, that's correct. Our understanding is that Pearson VUE is just going to contact those whose exams have cancelled. We will be contacting all candidates with a broader communication about the exams and their options going forward.

Will Pearson be refunding money for test takers who do not take the exam at one of their centers?

GW: We're smiling because Pearson doesn't refund money. It would be the fees that they paid us to take the examination. There are a host of options if you do want to cancel your exam or take it at one of the alternate options that we're going to offer. There will be no charges for cancellation in our system as we do in some of the other settings for cancellations.

You could request a refund. You could also request that the money be applied to next year if you want to cancel and take the exam in 2021.

Pearson will not be refunding any of our fees that we've paid them for the scheduling of those examinations. That's the other reason we're smiling. There are a lot of fixed costs for these exams based on what you contract and schedule. We're having to pay extra to set up these other options and are glad to do so.

If our residents are using the last week as vacation and were supposed to be taking their board exam in another city, how will this work for them? Will they receive a list of facilities available for the exam? This is probably particularly relevant since we're talking about opening up additional sites potentially.

GW: That's a good question. We haven't talked to Pearson about how they're going to advertise the client proctored sites and what the capacities are and whether that would be possible. I think that's a good question. We haven't really addressed that issue yet and we'll hope to do that.

We have less control over whether a site wants to let people in who they don't know. That's been asked several times and has been mentioned that they're happy to make accommodations for their own residents, but it's very fair to say that I'm not interested in opening this up acting like a Pearson center and taking other candidates too.

I think we're going to have to deal with those on an individual basis.

If 50% of our residents are cancelled, can we have them take the exam on site on the same day, or is that only available if we do have 100% of our residents?

GW: Yes. You can slice the cake however you like. What option is chosen by graduates does not have any bearing on what you offer. If there's only one person that wants to take it in your center with you as the proctor, we're happy to set that up. We want to have flexibility and options that are best for the candidates, and we're willing to put resources and our commitment to make that happen as best we can if it's feasible and we can do it in your setting.

How many hours on exam day would a client proctored site have to commit to being available, and how long is the exam?

WL: The exam is three hours and 45 minutes. However, there is some setup time to get the exam up and running, and there's also consideration if you were proctoring it on your site that had an accommodation. That's why those questions were on the survey, if you could accommodate either lactation or if you could accommodate double time. We do have candidates who do have extra time on the exam.

We totally understand that that may not be a possibility for all client proctored sites. They may be able to provide the standard exam, which I would say is about four and a half hours, but they might not be able to provide additional time for lactation accommodation or for double time. In that case, those candidates wouldn't be able to take it at your client proctored site.

Can the client proctored exam start time be selected by the institution?

GW: To some extent, I would say that that's an inevitability. What we would not allow is you to have several start times for the one exam during the day given the number of candidates. From a purity perspective and contact exposure, we can't have say three hours in the morning and three hours in the afternoon because from an exams standard, from an organizational standard that we have to meet, that would give the afternoon person a clear unfair advantage because somebody could tell them what was on the exam in the morning in broad areas.

That's a security thing. We could not do so. It would probably be one start time on each day.

Can we choose which date to offer the exam if our program becomes a client proctored site?

GW: No, they'll be the same date as the Pearson VUE site, the 26th and 29th at this point.

At this point, we're not planning on offering the client proctored option for the fall date. The fall date would just be Pearson VUE centers.

You don't have to commit to the Friday and the Monday. There are programs that don't have fellowships, so they may only be doing it on the one day. If you do have a fellowship, you can do it on that day. It's up to you what you want to do. It may be different groups of proctors too.

Does a client proctored site have to commit to offering the exam on both the residency and fellowships dates? Is there a minimum number of candidates they have to have on each date?

GW: No. But we can't give you an honorarium if nobody takes the exam.

While this is a unique situation, having a date for the QE in the fall that has been mentioned previously, and I believe in this context, I mean previously as prior to COVID. Is there any thought to looking at the success of pass rates scores of the June date and the fall date to determine if the date for the QE should be moved to the fall in the future?

GW: We could have a whole conference on that. We were discussing moving the exam date and sent out a survey to all the Program Directors and chairmen and outside stakeholders, and we heard overwhelmingly not to change the exam dates, so we did not move forward with an alternate Qualifying Exam scheduling date.

We are always open to that opportunity. We'd be happy to re-begin that discussion with our Program Director and Manager community at the CREOG meetings and through other avenues.

To be frank, we were surprised that there was not more interest in moving it when we asked about it on our surveys. It sounds like that's a broader discussion than we can do today, but we're happy to look into it.

What is hard to do is offer any high-stakes exam on different days because there's always the potential that performance may be different on different days. That's why it's typically avoided.

Is there a way for candidates to check in next week with Pearson VUE to make sure that they did not miss a cancellation email?

GW: Sure. I think you can always go in and login and check your schedule. That may be that what comes out in our communication is the most important thing is not the email you get, but that you have verified that with what is your schedule with Pearson VUE to make sure that if you got an email, it's correct that you need to do something, and if you didn't get an email that you still have your appointment because the time may change. We still don't know a whole lot from them about that.

Will times be opened up to cancelled candidates if others reschedule?

GW: We asked Pearson, and there is no holding of the slots so that if 10 people cancel, it doesn't mean we can move 10 other people into those slots. We don't control the testing center algorithms for delivery of those exams. Jane Smith can't cancel her exam so Jane Doe can take her exam that day in the center.

I think we asked that, and as I recall, that's not something they're able to do.

Will Pearson VUE give any preference to candidates going for fellowships?

GW: No. They will not give any preference to anybody in their system. They're unable to do that.

Were there any discussions of cancelling exams for all candidates and just administering the exam next year?

GW: There absolutely were, and that's why that's one of the options, you can just take the exam next year. Having said that, there are a lot of people in situations that we've been contacted about that absolutely want to move forward this year, right now, and others, as soon as possible.

The majority of these revolve around people who signed time-limited contracts that require them to be board-certified within a certain period of time and that was part of the impotence.

It may be that the best thing to do for some folks is to not take the exam until next year, and that's why that option is available.

How were the 770 candidates determined and decided that they would receive the cancellation notification email?

GW: We were told that it's an internal decision by Pearson VUE, and they've got an internal algorithm that does that. Again, we're not sure it's half of our exam candidates for that day or half the people that were taking the exams that day.

I think they did it in the fairest way they could, which probably means that it was done randomly. The one thing we were told is that there were specific kinds of certifications that were higher priority, and medical board certifications were an essential trades and industries, and we were higher on the list of priorities to not be cancelled.

WL: We do have priority over things that are not considered essential, but because Pearson VUE has to go down to 50% of all seats filled, we still are subject to that cancellation. It, as Dr. Wendel said, is an algorithm that Pearson VUE developed, and they're trying to be as fair as they can.

GW: I wouldn't say that we're a small customer, but we're only offering about 2,000 exams over two days. There are other clients that these testing centers have that have large, large numbers of candidates that are examined. To some extent, they've got to be as fair to their small customers as they are to their big customers and deliver on their contractual obligations that they signed with the organization.

We really have no control over this. That's one of the most frustrating things of all.

Residents who have been studying now will not want to defer the test to fall or next year. Can't Pearson have multiple test sessions in a day to accommodate the volume of test takers?

GW: The answer is at this point no. They're operating at 50% capacity, and they've done everything they can to balance delivering the tests that they've promised to every vendor they have. This is not a private ABOG testing center, and again, we're a small client. If you consider most areas, there are going to be a handful of people taking our exam at any center on either of those days.

I wish it were different, but that's the reality of the testing industry.

Will ABOG be receiving a list of cancellations from Pearson VUE and communicate with candidates to offer rescheduling options, or is it the responsibility of the candidates to find best options and make ABOG aware?

GW: It's probably a combination of both. We're going to work with everybody to have a communication strategy to help them make an informed decision about what their options are and to move forward as best we can with what we can control.

How many people are registered to take the exam versus the 770 people who will not be able to take the exam?

WL: It's about, as Dr. Wendel said earlier, it's about 2,000 people total between the two days. We're not 100% certain that that 770 applies to the specialty exam and the subspecialty exam or if it's only a portion of the specialty exam, so we have that question out to Pearson VUE. But it's about 2,000 people total across the two days.

Does the proctor have to be a physician?

GW: No. I think we answered that one already. It can be a Program Manager. If it's not a physician, it has to be a Program Manager, I think. We have to have somebody within the GME community that understands these processes.

What happens if a resident shows up sick the day of the exam?

GW: That wouldn't be good for anybody. Pearson VUE will not allow you in. They have criteria that you have to meet, and you'll have to have your temperature taken, you'll have to wear a mask, you'll be offered gloves. If you're at a Pearson VUE center, there are screening things that would have to be met before you're allowed in.

You also can't have had close contact with anybody with COVID-19 in a prior two weeks. One of the exclusions, I hope anywhere, is that nobody would try to come in if they feel sick or believe they're infectious in any way.

How can a program check internet capacity to see if they're a candidate to administer the exam?

GW: There's a link in the email that was sent out on the third page that takes you to the Pearson VUE client proctored system requirements page. Within that document is a link called Advanced Technical Specifications, and that will take you to the more detailed information so that you could test both your individual computer, as well as your site.

If the residents use their own laptop, will they receive the link ahead of time to test their laptop's capability? Will that be distributed by ABOG directly to them or should the program's send that out?

WL: We'll work with the programs to make sure that they have all of the links and all of the information that they need. If client proctored becomes a reality, that's why it'll be so important that we have the contact information at the proctor at each site so that we can make sure they have everything they need so that on the morning of the exam, we can be as comfortable as possible that the exam is actually going to be able to go through.

Can some of the exam funds be used to offset any IT charges?

GW: All of our funds are going to be offset to help underwrite these IT charges. We have to figure out what the IT charges are and if they're reasonable given the fact that we're having such a limited number of people. We really don't know what individual institutions would charge. They're probably going to charge by the event, not by the number of people taking the exam, and that'll be one of the things we'll have to look at in your application to be a testing site.

Has there been any thought about hosting a Zoom meeting for graduates to gain their feedback?

GW: Yes. That's probably going to be planned. We don't want to give them information that's uncertain. That's just going to make things worse. We're trying to control what we can and know what we can know right now before we go to them. That's why moved this meeting in so quickly to find out is it even feasible to have a department or a residency proctored exam.

Once we've decided that that's a possibility, we can go to the residents. Yes, we have a communication strategy that will be out for the residents that we've been working with the Junior Fellows in that regard and have had preliminary conversations with them.

If several sites are able to proctor the exam, why is Pearson cancelling 50% of the residents? Shouldn't they wait until they know the residents can take it elsewhere before making a final decision?

GW: We can't control what an organization does. They look at it in a different fashion than we do, and that's all I can tell you. It's out of our control. We're just trying to react and do the best we can.

Is the board issuing some sort of statement about accreditation about written boards pending for those who choose to take the exam next year?

GW: The short answer is yes. They will remain a residency graduate until they pass that examination in our statuses. If anybody needs any further documentation, we can take care of that. Anybody who extends their exam to next year and doesn't take it this year will get another year of eligibility for certification by us.

If the site is designated as a client proctored site, how will candidates outside of our program know that we're an option as a client proctored site? Will there be a maximum or minimum number of candidates at a client proctored site?

GW: All those are things we will determine with you as we move forward in this process. I think you have an opportunity to say that the capacity and who, and we'll learn more about that as we're going forward. That's part of our feasibility discussions going forward.

Just to clarify, the client proctored exam date will only be in June and not the fall.

GW: The client proctored will be only in June and not in the fall. Yep.

Program Managers will most likely be giving these exams. The health risks to the Program Managers doesn't seem to be considered with these testing options.

GW: If we implied that, I apologize. That was one of the things Wilma said. Each institution is going to be in control of their own infection control guidelines. That's the challenge of accepting people from the outside is how would you at your institution set guidelines on who can come in and take the exam and who can't.

I would feel no obligation at all to take individuals from the outside that I don't know and I can't feel competent are following every guideline that I know my residents are living with. I can't make that any more blunt.

Our goal is not to expose anybody for any reason to a voluntary certification exam. If you feel that in any way you would be, then I would say don't sign up as a proctor. If your institution has standards that would not allow people to come in, then I think you're in a higher enough risk setting that I wouldn't advise you to sign up either. We don't want any candidates or staff to be exposed.

That's part of the reason Pearson VUE has very strict guidelines. It's not just to protect people from getting infected while they're there taking the exam, but it's to protect their staff in addition.

Would you be willing to write the proctor payment to the institution if the proctor wishes?

GW: Yes. We'll pay whoever you tell us to.

GW: Thank you very much for getting together on such short notice. We will continue to be as transparent as we can. We appreciate your input. Every question you had has made us look at things carefully and perhaps even in a new light. Thank you very much. Please feel free to contact us offline at any time with any of your questions. Thanks.