

Oral board jitters? Try these rehearsal tips

Many candidates become anxious before and during the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology (ABPN) part II oral exam, especially if they failed before. As many as 50% of candidates fail the part II oral exam on the first try, and those who fail a second time risk failing several times.¹

Studying more and worrying less can improve your chance of passing, whether it's your first time taking the test or after an initial failure. You may also perform better if you begin the certification process promptly after residency training.² By fitting rehearsal opportunities into a busy schedule, you—or residents you supervise—can prepare for the exam's oral portion and reduce test-taking anxiety.

Form a study group. Take turns performing oral board-type interviews with other candidates. Give and receive informal feedback while you practice.

Conduct many mock board interviews. Mock interviews with volunteer patients who have given written or verbal consent are the most-thorough form of exam preparation, especially when supervised by psychiatrists who have been examiners. Try to do as many as your schedule permits.

Practice on your patients. When you see a new patient, keep the board process in mind and try to do a 30-minute interview. Imagine you are in front of the examiners.

Dictate evaluations as if presenting to examiners. Tape-recording dictations allows you to review your presentation later and critique yourself.

Practice for the exam's video portion. Because this

part is commonly overlooked, many candidates pass the live interview but fail the video portion.

For the video portion, you are asked to watch a short video of a patient interview and present a case based on information from the video. You can purchase sample videos from commercial test preparation organizations, which often advertise in American Psychiatric Association newsletters.

Videotape yourself interviewing and presenting the case. Reviewing the videos can help you identify and correct body language problems so that you convey warmth, empathy, and confidence. You can videotape an interview after obtaining written consent from the patient. If no patients agree, videotape yourself giving the case presentation only.

Practice in inpatient, outpatient, and office settings. This gives you a chance to practice interviewing patients with a variety of psychiatric conditions.

These tips can help you make the 30-minute interview and presentation second nature, reduce exam anxiety, and increase your chance of passing.

References

- 1 Moran M. Project helps candidate succeed on ABPN exam. *Psychiatr News* 2005;40(17):22.
- 2 Juul D, Scully JH Jr, Scheiber SC. Achieving board certification in psychiatry: a cohort study. *Am J Psychiatry* 2003;160(3):563-5.

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