

# Board Readiness

Amanda Pickert, MD



Preparing for the dermatology board certification examination is an onerous job that commences with the beginning of residency. Prior to writing this column, I queried my colleagues for their input and received a wide range of helpful tips. Herein I have compiled a list of their recommendations as well as the resources they found useful throughout residency and during their preparation for the boards. My suggestion to all residents is to start early; the more you do up front and throughout residency, the better prepared you will be at the finish. By the last year of residency, there should be little information in dermatology that you have not learned. Ideally, the focus of board preparation should be cramming the “rogue memory board fodder” into your brain for regurgitation on test day. Most of this information is not anything we use or think of daily when seeing patients, but it is important to know for boards and occasional dermatologic situations. In the real world, resources will almost always be available to provide the tedious details. Nevertheless, as motivation to learn this information and not just where to find it, I will state that knowledge of the usual as well as the unexpected is what makes a physician exceptional. Additionally, we all want to be brilliant and make great diagnoses, so let us learn.

## Textbooks

Several colleagues suggest reading *Dermatology* by Bologna et al<sup>1</sup> (the third edition was just released) cover to cover at least once during residency. I have done it and I think it is very helpful, especially during the first year of residency. It provides the breadth of dermatology, and with the exception of

the basic science chapters, which are just information dense, it is well-written and not difficult to read. Some individuals will read *Fitzpatrick's Dermatology in General Medicine* by Wolff et al<sup>2</sup> instead. I have read both and prefer *Dermatology*. With *Dermatology*, I have been told that reading the genodermatoses section prior to boards, which also includes genetics, is high yield. Additionally, if you are similar to me, you also might want to review the basic science chapters prior to boards, which often are skipped over because they are a laborious read.

*Genodermatoses: A Clinical Guide to Genetic Skin Disorders* by Spitz<sup>3</sup> is a great book and almost every resident has it. You should buy it at the beginning of residency and look at it throughout. It will make you familiar with the basics of the most common genodermatoses. I also received good feedback about the *Requisites in Dermatology* series; both the *Dermatopathology*<sup>4</sup> and *Dermatologic Surgery*<sup>5</sup> books are good. In my residency, we used the dermatopathology edition as our main teaching text for this area. When beginning residency, this book will provide you with digestible amounts of information unlike some other texts. A working knowledge of everything in *Requisites in Dermatology: Dermatopathology*<sup>4</sup> should be adequate for boards.

The dermatology in-review binder sponsored by Galderma is a great comprehensive review source that you can add to your list. I often stick to the American Academy of Dermatology's *Directions in Residency* handouts with the good board fodder in the Galderma binder. If you do not receive this binder every year from your residency program, find out how to get it; it is free. *McGraw Hill Specialty Board Review Dermatology: A Pictorial Review* by Ali<sup>6</sup> is a nice comprehensive review book that provides useful charts. Several residents also look to the orange *Handbook of Dermatology: A Practical Manual* by Mann et al<sup>7</sup> and the purple *Dermatology Quick Glance* by

From Mayo Clinic Arizona, Scottsdale.

The author reports no conflict of interest.

Jaffer and Qureshi,<sup>8</sup> which are dermatology pocket books. I prefer the orange-colored pocket book. Someone once told me that if you know everything in the orange book, you will pass boards with flying colors.

### Online Resources

Online resources are a huge help with several Kodachromes and question banks. Various dermatology residency programs have great resources on their Web sites that usually can be accessed, so be sure to look at Web sites for several different programs. Some online resources that residents have found helpful include Derm 101 (<http://derm101.com>). There is a fee, but you can receive a free 30-day trial or a promotional card that allows use. The Web site provides great photographs and there also is a smartphone app. In addition to their binder, Galderma offers free online resources (<http://dermatologyinreview.com/Galderma>), including Kodachromes, dermatopathology information, and question banks. The resource also has a helpful smartphone app. My favorite smartphone app right now is Derm Q&A, which costs \$50 but is helpful when you have time to ask a few questions on your smartphone. Other resources that have been suggested by my colleagues but are not familiar to me include DermNet NZ (<http://www.dermnetnz.org/>), the British Association of Dermatologists Web site (<http://www.bad.org.uk/site/1/default.aspx>), and VisualDx (visual clinical decision support system)(<http://www.visualdx.com/>). See if you like any of them.

### Review Courses

There are plenty of helpful review courses, and depending on funding, some can be quite expensive. You should receive flyers throughout residency regarding different courses. Indiana University offers a cutaneous biology course annually in November. The course is somewhat helpful but does not directly target board information. My colleagues have reported that the Florida Dermatology and Dermatopathology Board

Review Course (University of Florida) is beneficial; I will be attending this year. The Oakstone Institute offers a dermatology board review course that is self-study. You pay to use the program materials (ie, video, audio) and then study on your own using the materials. I am unaware of the usefulness of this program, as none of my colleagues have purchased the online resources. Galderma has an annual preboard seminar in Chicago, and I was told by one resident that it is a good course. It is great if you are able to afford a review course, but they are not a must. Many residents pass their boards doing nothing more than studying from the books they already own.

### Final Thoughts

Hopefully this information was helpful. Good luck to everyone. Do not forget to have fun, and thank you for reading my column.

### REFERENCES

1. Bologna JL, Jorizzo JL, Schaffer JV, eds. *Dermatology*. 3rd ed. New York, NY: Elsevier Saunders; 2012.
2. Wolff K, Goldsmith L, Katz S, et al, eds. *Fitzpatrick's Dermatology in General Medicine*. 7th ed. New York, NY: McGraw Hill; 2007.
3. Spitz JL. *Genodermatoses: A Clinical Guide to Genetic Skin Disorders*. Hong Kong, China: Lippincott Williams and Wilkins Hardcover; 2004.
4. Elston DM, Ferringer T, eds. *Requisites in Dermatology: Dermatopathology*. China: Saunders Elsevier; 2009.
5. Vidimos AT, Ammirati CT, Poblete-Lopez C, eds. *Requisites in Dermatology: Dermatologic Surgery*. China: Saunders Elsevier; 2008.
6. Ali A, ed. *McGraw Hill Specialty Board Review Dermatology: A Pictorial Review*. New York, NY: McGraw Hill; 2010.
7. Mann MW, Berk DR, Popkin DL, et al. *Handbook of Dermatology: A Practical Manual*. Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell Publishing; 2009.
8. Jaffer S, Qureshi AA. *Dermatology Quick Glance*. New York, NY: McGraw Hill; 2004.