

# **CORD Guidance Summary: ABEM Public Reporting of EM Board Passage Rates**

## **Summary**

- As of October, 2025, ABEM is now publishing residency-specific, aggregated pass-rate data for first-time takers of the Qualifying Exam (QE) and Oral Certification Exam (OCE)
- Results are shown as 3-year rolling averages by graduation year; only programs with  $\geq 3$  graduating cohorts are included.
- This comes amidst recent literature describing multi-year declines in QE pass rates and ITE/QE mean scores.

## **How to Use and Interpret the Reported Pass Rates**

Applicant selection for residency is complex, and success in standardized testing is only one indicator of what makes a successful physician. CORD strongly discourages overreliance on test metrics and provides these recommendations and resources to aid in the interpretation of the publicly available ABEM board pass rates by program.

### **For Residency Leadership**

- Treat pass rates as one measurement amongst many. Use them as information alongside other program quality measures (resident feedback, graduate job outcomes, faculty stability, curriculum, remediation systems, wellness, scholarship, etc.).
- Focus on trends over multiple cohorts, not single snapshots.
- If your program's rate is below peers, perform a structured and comprehensive program review including exam preparation and curriculum alignment.
- Communicate clearly about what the data do—and do not—mean (first-time takers only, small-N caution) to current and prospective residents and faculty. It may be helpful to create a one-page explainer to share with residents and faculty summarizing what's reported and where to find ABEM's FAQs.
- Avoid incentives with potentially negative consequences such as deterring at-risk residents from taking boards.
- Continue to commit to holistic review and seek to recruit applicants who align with your program's mission and have the potential to develop into outstanding emergency physicians.

- Be prepared to discuss your board pass rates and any relevant context with applicants. It may be helpful to prepare an applicant-facing FAQ situating your pass-rate trend within broader educational outcomes (clinical experience, job outcomes, fellowship matches, scholarly output, etc.)

## **For Applicants**

- Use pass-rate reports to ask better questions, not to rank programs. It is one piece of data in a sea of many to use to inform your decision about which program will best meet your training needs.
- Understand limitations: Multiple factors including individual, programmatic, and test characteristics may influence pass rates. Data reflect first-time takers only, are three-year averages, exclude some programs, and should be interpreted with caution particularly for smaller programs where individual performance will have a relatively greater effect.
- Consider broader fit and training quality (clinical exposure, mentorship, wellness, fellowship/job placement, scholarly opportunities) in addition to pass rates when considering programs.

## **Curated Resources**

Kelleher ME, Santen SA, Draper C, Jordan J, Gottlieb M, Kinnear B. Board scores in the spotlight: Public reporting and the unintended consequences. *AEM Educ Train*. 2025 Mar 31;9(2): e70006. doi: 10.1002/aet2.70006. PMID: 40171001; PMCID: PMC11957946.

Reisdorff EJ, Keim SM, Gorgas DL, White SR, Kendall JL, Ruff KC, Ankel FK, Farrell SE, Calderon Y, Gottlieb M, Bhakta Y, Barton MA, Joldersma KB. Declining Performance on American Board of Emergency Medicine Written Examinations. *AEM Educ Train*. 2025 Oct 24;9(5):e70105. doi: 10.1002/aet2.70105. PMID: 41141361; PMCID: PMC12552112.

Werner RM, Asch DA. The unintended consequences of publicly reporting quality information. *JAMA*. 2005 Mar 9;293(10):1239-44. doi: 10.1001/jama.293.10.1239. PMID: 15755946.

Kelleher M, Schumacher DJ, Zhou C, Kwakye D, Santen SA, Warm E, Kinnear B. Public Board Score Reporting Undermines Holistic Review for Residency Selection. *J Gen Intern Med*. 2025 Jan;40(1):17-21. doi: 10.1007/s11606-024-09133-7. Epub 2024 Nov 4. PMID: 39496852; PMCID: PMC11780034.

Harmouche E, Goyal N, Pinawin A, Nagarwala J, Bhat R. USMLE Scores Predict Success in ABEM Initial Certification: A Multicenter Study. *West J Emerg Med*. 2017 Apr;18(3):544-549. doi: 10.5811/westjem.2016.12.32478. Epub 2017 Feb 7. PMID: 28435509; PMCID: PMC5391908.

Wadhera RK, Joynt Maddox KE, Yeh RW, Bhatt DL. Public Reporting of Percutaneous Coronary Intervention Outcomes: Moving Beyond the Status Quo. *JAMA Cardiol*. 2018 Jul 1;3(7):635-640. doi: 10.1001/jamacardio.2018.0947. PMID: 29800962; PMCID: PMC6093852.

Gottlieb M, Davenport D, Landry A, Bailey J, Westrick J, Daniel M. Holistic Review in Applicant Selection: A Scoping Review. *Acad Med*. 2025 Feb 1;100(2):219-228. doi: 10.1097/ACM.0000000000005891. Epub 2024 Oct 1. PMID: 39348144; PMCID: PMC11776880.

Edmond MB, Deschenes JL, Eckler M, Wenzel RP. Racial bias in using USMLE step 1 scores to grant internal medicine residency interviews. *Acad Med*. 2001 Dec;76(12):1253-6. doi: 10.1097/00001888-200112000-00021. PMID: 11739053.

Norcini JJ, Boulet JR, Opalek A, Dauphinee WD. Specialty Board Certification Rate as an Outcome Metric for GME Training Institutions: A Relationship With Quality of Care. *Eval Health Prof*. 2020 Sep;43(3):143-148. doi: 10.1177/0163278718796128. Epub 2018 Aug 27. PMID: 30149726.

Atsawarungruangkit A. Residency program characteristics that are associated with pass rate of the American Board of Pediatrics certifying exam. *Adv Med Educ Pract*. 2015 Aug 14;6:517-24. doi: 10.2147/AMEP.S90022. PMID: 26316837; PMCID: PMC4542559.