

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 ≥ 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

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