

An Open Letter to Licensure Candidates

The movement to reform certification testing requirements for licensure has resulted in several negative commentaries and articles directed at testing agencies in general as well as specific agencies such as the Western Regional Examining Board (WREB). We at the WREB take exception to the depiction that we offer a licensing examination that is out of touch with current dental practice and evaluation options (“archaic”), and that we have little concern for candidates and patients. We agree with the conjecture, in most of the negative articles, that obtaining patients for the licensing examinations sometimes presents problems for candidates, but we are concerned about the patient population that we believe would be negatively impacted by the changes proposed. WREB examination procedures are continually reviewed by highly qualified practitioners and faculty from within our member states in an effort to provide the most up to date evaluations that reflect the interests of the public, the educational community, and the candidates we serve.

Contrary to the often erroneously presented anecdotal evidence used by the proponents of major reform in licensure, evidence from WREB candidate and patient critiques indicates a high degree of satisfaction with the examination experience. One candidate recently stated that “I felt that I was treated more like a colleague than a candidate.” Overall, the responses are much more positive than negative. Patients and candidates are generally pleased with the examination experience. The few negative responses by candidates are primarily related to the prosthetics and endodontic sections of the examination (where patients are not used). Both candidates and patients are positive about the treatment of patients with the exception of the few who are concerned about waiting in line for examiner evaluation. This concern and other concerns that are presented in critiques are studied by WREB committees for resolution and have resulted in examination changes. Planned scheduling changes using bar code scanners networked to computers for check-in are expected to reduce the patient lines.

WREB is responsible to state licensing agencies, patients, candidates and dental and dental hygiene schools. The examinations we provide represent our best efforts to economically meet the needs of these various entities while delivering a standardized, reliable evaluation of competence throughout the diverse geographic regions of the country. We have incorporated features that compensate for human error on the part of both candidates and examiners. We require that patients meet certain criteria that disallow unnecessary treatment and provide an equal opportunity for all candidates to demonstrate their competence. The examinations are under constant scrutiny by examiners, educators and testing specialists so that they can be updated to incorporate the most current practices and technologies in testing and in patient treatment. Those who would like to understand our views and the reasons that we feel patients are currently essential in evaluating competence in dental and dental hygiene practice are invited to read an article on the WREB website at www.wreb.org