



ASSOCIATION OF RESIDENTS IN RADIATION ONCOLOGY

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Shauna R. Campbell, DO
Chair
PGY-4
Cleveland Clinic Foundation

Elizabeth B. Jeans, MD
Vice-Chair
PGY-3
Mayo Clinic Rochester

Karen G. Tye, MD
Vice-Chair
PGY-4
University of California
San Diego

Justin Anderson, MD
Junior Member
PGY-2
Mayo Clinic Arizona

Sarah Dooley, MD
Junior Member
PGY-3
University of Miami

Austin Sim, MD, JD
Junior Member
PGY-3
Moffitt Cancer Center

Chelain Goodman, MD PhD
Immediate Past Chair
PGY-5
Northwestern University
Feinberg School of Medicine

Ashley A. Albert, MD
Immediate Past Vice-Chair
PGY-5
University of Mississippi
Medical Center

Ankit Agarwal, MD MBA
Immediate Past Vice-Chair
PGY-4
UNC Health Care

Date: May 27, 2020

To: The American Board of Radiology Initial Certification Advisory Committee
The American Board of Radiology Radiation Oncology Board of Trustees
Paul Wallner, DO; Kaled Alektiar, MD; Anthony Gerdeman, PhD;
Valerie Jackson, MD; Brent Wagner, MD;

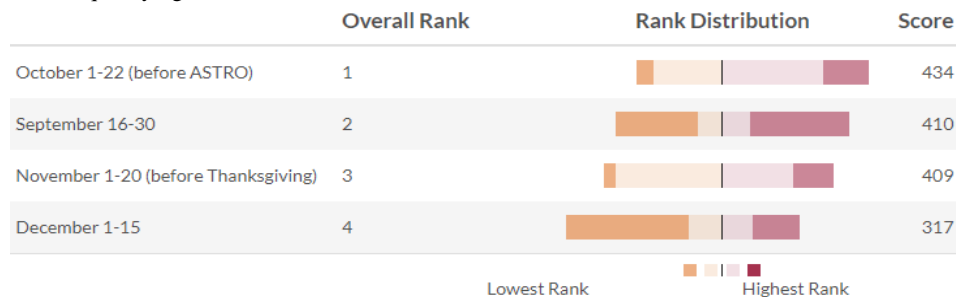
RE: Initial Certification Qualification Examination Rescheduling

The Association of Residents in Radiation Oncology (ARRO) Executive Committee (EC) would like to present the results of a survey distributed to PGY-4 and PGY-5 residents in an effort to understand the perspective of residents planning to sit for the 2020 Initial Certification Qualification examinations. This survey was conducted in anticipation of the American Board of Radiology (ABR) Initial Certification Advisory Committee (IC-AC) teleconference on May 28, 2020. Although the rescheduled dates of the 2020 written qualifying examinations were announced prior to this meeting, we feel it is important to convey the results of this survey, given the strong consensus among these residents.

Clinical Radiation Oncology Written Examination

The ARRO EC surveyed 190 members of the graduating class of 2020 (current PGY-5 residents) with available email addresses. Between May 14-27, 2020, 158 residents responded for a response rate of 83%. PGY-5 residents strongly preferred that the rescheduled clinical written examination be delivered in October, with late September and early November being close second and third preferences (Figure 1). The December date was the least preferred option by far. There was also strong consensus among PGY-5 residents regarding the preferred format of the rescheduled examinations, with 76% stating they would prefer the examinations be offered via a secure web-based platform with remote proctoring. This format would ensure that the examinations can take place as scheduled, so that further disruption of clinical and professional obligations can be prevented in the event that Pearson VUE is unable to proctor the examination yet again in December. This proposal has also recently been strongly endorsed by the Society of Chairs of Radiation Oncology Programs (SCAROP) and the American Society for Radiation Oncology (ASTRO) Executive Boards.

Figure 1. Preferred rescheduling options among PGY-5 residents for the clinical radiation oncology written qualifying examination in 2020.

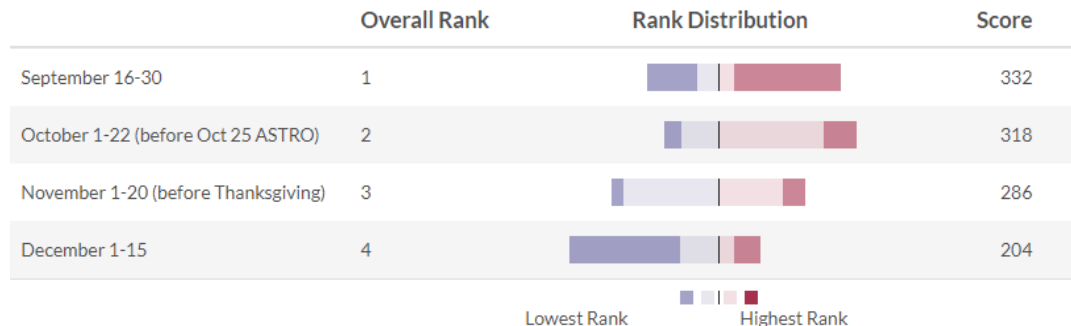


In addition, 77% of PGY-5 respondents report intentionally setting new employment start dates after the clinical written examination as originally scheduled in July. At this time, Pearson VUE testing centers anticipate being open during July; earlier attempts to transition to a secure, web-based exam administration format would have significantly limited the disruption to new graduates as they begin their careers.

### **Medical Physics and Radiation and Cancer Biology Written Examinations**

The ARRO EC also surveyed 193 members of the graduating class of 2021 (current PGY-4 residents) with available email addresses. Between May 18-27, 2020, 121 residents responded for a response rate of 63%. PGY-4 residents strongly preferred that the rescheduled medical physics and radiation and cancer biology written examinations be delivered in late September, with early October being a close second preference (Figure 2). The December date was the least preferred option by far. Identical to the responses from PGY-5 residents, 76% of PGY-4 residents stated they would prefer the rescheduled examinations be offered via a secure web-based platform with remote proctoring due to concerns that Pearson VUE will be unable to proctor the examinations yet again in December. Again, this proposal is strongly endorsed by the SCAROP and ASTRO Executive Boards.

**Figure 2.** Preferred rescheduling options among PGY-4 residents for the medical physics and radiation and cancer biology written qualifying examinations in 2020.



### **ABR Communication**

When asked to rate their satisfaction with the ABR’s communication regarding examination rescheduling on a 5-category Likert scale, 51% of PGY-4 residents and 40% of PGY-5 residents report they are “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied” with the communication they have received from the ABR.

### **Summary of Radiation Oncology Initiation Certification Qualification Examinations: The Resident Experience in 2019, in-press at Practical Radiation Oncology**

Given the possibility that the currently rescheduled examinations held at Pearson VUE testing centers may need to be rescheduled yet again should there be a second wave of COVID-19, we feel it is important for the ABR to understand the amount of time that residents report is required to adequately prepare for these examinations. Following the 2019 Initial Certification Examinations, residents from the classes of 2019 and 2020 were surveyed to characterize preparation for the written examinations, of whom 58% completed this survey (n=210). In the 12 weeks prior to the examinations, surveyed respondents reported studying a median of 160 hours [IQR 96-270] for the medical physics and radiation and cancer biology examinations and 120 hours [IQR 80-180] for the clinical written examination. As already experienced by physicians preparing for the oral boards, further delay in these examinations will likely result in additional time spent studying and further disruption in clinical schedules as preparation for these examinations begins months in advance. When asked about combining all three written examinations into one consolidated examination, 63% of respondents endorsed or had no objection to this change.

We appreciate the effort by the ABR to reschedule the qualifying examinations with sufficient notice. Unfortunately, we believe the current plans for in-person oral and written examinations do not appropriately take into account the uncertainty of COVID-19. The board organizations for ophthalmology, surgery, and anesthesiology have thus far led the charge among medical specialties by working to transition these examinations to a web-based format while ensuring the high standards for examination fairness, security and reproducibility. We strongly urge the ABR to be a leader among medical specialties by transitioning to a web-based examination administration as future adjustments to the schedule, even if announced months in advance, will lead to significant stress on candidates and possibly delay timely board certification.

Sincerely,

The Association of Residents in Radiation Oncology (ARRO) Executive Committee  
Shauna R. Campbell, DO Chair  
Chelain R. Goodman, MD PhD Immediate Past Chair