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Successful cardiac CT certification hinges on clinical experience, not CME

By H.A. Abella

Radiologists and cardiologists who meet image interpretation requirements for cardiac CT competence certification do equally well on the test, according to results of the first Cardiac CT Board Examination. Board exam results also hint that actual clinical experience counts more toward passing scores than does medical education.

"There was no difference between radiologists and cardiologists as far as how they performed in the exam," said lead investigator Dr. Allen J. Taylor, director of advanced cardiac imaging at the Washington Hospital Center in Washington, DC. "It had more to do with what training they received than whether they were radiologists or cardiologists."

Investigators found that the overall criteria not only worked as intended but also helped identify those candidates who performed well in the examination. They released study results at the 2009 Society of Cardiovascular Computed Tomography meeting in Orlando, FL.

Researchers noted high passing rates among candidates with more than one month of cardiac CT reading experience during clinical fellowships (100% pass); those with formal CT imaging fellowships (96.3% pass); and early adopters of the technology or "self-trained" candidates (93.2% pass). Level 3 candidates had a higher pass rate than Level 2 candidates (88.7% vs. 77.8%, $p = 0.003$).

Increased time in active clinical practice was associated with progressively higher pass rates ($p < 0.001$). Case review on workstations in CME courses or workshops did not show a statistically significant correlation with exam results.

Results from the board examination were particularly useful for discerning individuals who had actual hands-on experience from those who lacked it. However, even candidates who barely met the criteria for initial competency did reasonably well, Taylor told *Diagnostic Imaging*.

"That was an encouraging sign," he said.

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