

May 26, 2020

Brent Wagner, MD  
President  
The American Board of Radiology  
5441 E. Williams Circle  
Tucson, Arizona 85711-7412

Re: Radiation Oncology Initial Certifying Exams

Dear Dr. Wagner:

ASTRO truly appreciates the unprecedented challenges that have accompanied the COVID-19 pandemic. We support the decision by the ABR to postpone the oral and written radiation oncology certifying exams to ensure the safety of all involved in this endeavor, and we acknowledge the leadership of the ABR in making such a difficult decision.

Through our relationship with the Association of Residents in Radiation Oncology (ARRO), we have become aware of the ABR's plans to convene the in-person oral exam in Tucson, AZ in October and to administer the written exams via in-person testing at Pearson VUE testing sites in December. We discussed this matter during our most recent ASTRO Board meeting. The ASTRO Board unanimously wishes to convey to the ABR that we strongly support the conversion of all radiation oncology certifying oral and written exams to a virtual exam format that would require neither travel nor dependency on third-party testing sites. We encourage the ABR to consider alignment with other ABMS Board organizations that have researched this subject thoroughly and recently elected to transition to a virtual exam format.

Our support for the transition to virtual exams is based on several considerations. First, as representatives of the specialty hailing from a variety of academic and community practices, we do not anticipate that all of the faculty volunteers who would serve as oral examiners will be able to travel to Tucson this fall or winter. Academic radiation oncologists will very likely have continued travel restrictions imposed by their institutions for a multitude of reasons, and community radiation oncologists may additionally face financial pressures to rebuild patient volumes. Consequently, we are very concerned about the feasibility of administering a robust in-person oral board examination this year. Indeed, our concern regarding the ability of radiation oncologists to travel prompted ASTRO to recently transition our live annual meeting, scheduled for late October 2020, to an entirely virtual format. Second, with respect to the written exams, the underlying nature of the COVID-19 pandemic coupled with the expected fall/winter return of seasonal influenza renders a high likelihood of future hotspots that could close certain Pearson VUE testing sites and threaten the viability of the plan to administer nationally simultaneous in-person written exams in December. Third, we are cognizant that both residents and training programs organize many aspects of their lives and academic schedules around the predictable cadence of the certifying exams. The likelihood of further delays and disruptions to the in-person

oral and written exams poses a major challenge to these individuals that should not be disregarded.

In summary, for the reasons outlined above and consistent with trends across other medical specialty organizations, the ASTRO Board strongly and unanimously recommends that the ABR consider transitioning to virtual certifying exams for the field of radiation oncology as quickly as feasible. We further counsel the ABR to engage the recently empaneled Initial Certification Advisory Committee to facilitate decision making that engages stakeholders. We understand that SCAROP has offered to proctor virtual exams at home institutions, and we likewise are happy to offer practical help the ABR needs to implement virtual exams during this time of rapid change. Thank you for your consideration of these recommendations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laura Thevenot". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Laura" written in a larger, more prominent hand than the last name "Thevenot".

Laura Thevenot  
Chief Executive Officer

Cc: Valerie Jackson, MD, Executive Director, ABR  
Paul Wallner, DO, Associate Executive Director, Radiation Oncology, ABR