

## **Supplemental Digital Appendix 1**

### **Semistructured Interview Guide From a Qualitative Study of How Physicians Prepare for Maintenance of Certification Exams, 2016–2017<sup>a</sup>**

#### **INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE**

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am a researcher with the [American Board of Internal Medicine/American Board of Family Medicine].

[If co-interviewer is present: With me on the call today is my colleague \_\_\_\_\_. (Pause for co-interviewer to introduce self.)]

We appreciate your taking the time today to help us with our research on how physicians prepare for the [ABFM or ABIM] MOC exam. We'd like to ask you some questions about what you did to prepare for the exam you took recently. We'd like to ask that you be open and candid—there are no right or wrong answers, and we will keep your personal information completely confidential. Nothing you say will affect your standing with the Board in any way. We are only interested in learning about your experience around the exam.

If we ever publish or present anything from this study, we will not include your name or any information that could identify you in any way.

[Verify date of most recent MOC examination.]

[Review oral consent.]

Here's how the interview process will work:

The conversation should take about 45-60 minutes. [If co-interviewer is present, introduce and clarify that their role is to take notes and ask additional follow-up questions if necessary.] We'd like to record the conversation in case we need to go back and check our notes—do we have your permission to record?

[Confirm consent to record audio.]

Do you have any questions before we get started?

## **BACKGROUND**

1. First, before we ask about the exam, we just want to get a little background information about the scope of your practice. How would you describe your practice?

*Probe for:*

- What kinds of patients do you tend to see, and what is your relationship with them?
- How would you describe your scope of practice (full-spectrum, cradle to grave, etc.)?
- Does your practice focus on any particular type(s) of condition/patient?

## EXAM PREP: WHAT PHYSICIAN DID TO PREPARE

Now, thinking about the MOC exam you took most recently...

2. What did you do to prepare for the exam?

*Probe for:*

- How did you choose this approach?
- How did your process of preparing for the exam compare with what you normally do to stay up to date?

3. Did you use any specific materials to prepare? If so, what were they and how did you use them?

*Probe for:*

- How did you select the materials you used?
- Did you use anything from [ABIM/ABFM] itself—the exam blueprint or any other materials? If so, what/how?
- Did you use any non-Board materials? (e.g., exam review guides, online modules, other web resources, etc.)

4. Did you attend any exam-preparation courses? If so, what were they, and what information did they cover?

*Probe for:*

- How did you select this course/these courses?
- Extent to which course focused on exam strategy vs medical knowledge

5. Did you prepare with other physicians? If so, what did you do, and who with? (no specific names, just general roles)

*Probe for:*

- Relationship (i.e., how found the group)

6. Did you focus on any particular topic areas/information? If so, what were they, and why?

*Probe for:*

- General topic areas
- Specific information
- Information specific to clinical work or subspecialty area vs “cross content”

*For each topic mentioned, probe for:*

- How did you decide to focus on this area/these areas?

7. How much time did you spend to prepare?

*Probe for:*

- How long before the exam date did you start to prepare? (and why?)
- How much total time did you spend? (approximately)

8. How did you actually organize your time—when and under what conditions did you prepare? (in the office, at home, etc.)

*Probe for:*

- How did you structure the time? (e.g., x amount per week for a defined period, y amount in a specific course, etc.)
- What would you have otherwise done with the time? (patient care, family, “drive time,” etc.)

## **EXAM PREP: IMPACT ON LIFE OF WHAT PHYSICIAN DID TO PREPARE**

9. (If not already answered in previous questions) Did your exam preparation activities have any impact on your life? If so, what/how?

- Practice (time away from patient care, distraction from patients or other duties, etc.)
- Personal life (family time, travel time)

10. What was the financial cost of what you did to prepare?

*Probe for:*

- What kind of reimbursement or credit did you receive for your preparation, if any?
- Any CME credit?

11. In general, does knowing you'll have to take an MOC exam influence your CME activities—what you choose to do to get CME, how you engage with your CME activities and materials, etc.? If so, what/how?

[Interjection point—check-in with co-interviewer, if present.]

## **IMPACT OF PREPARATION ON PHYSICIAN'S CLINICAL KNOWLEDGE**

12. Thinking back over what you did to prepare, can you give us examples of specific clinical knowledge that you learned?

*Probe for specifics:*

- General ideas/areas
- Specific points of information

13. Did the exam process affect how you think about clinical guidelines—make you aware of new information, reinforce what you already knew, etc.? If so, how?

*Probe for:*

- Make you aware of new information?
- Reinforce what you already knew?
- Increase/decrease your confidence level in your knowledge in this area?
- Change your sense of the nuances of guidelines and when to apply them or not?

14. Did you share any of what you learned or reviewed with other physicians—people you were studying with, colleagues, etc.? If so, with whom/how?

*Probe for:*

- What was their reaction/response? (if any)
- Did it lead to any further discussion/changes to practice/research, etc.?

## **IMPACT OF PREPARATION ON PRACTICE**

15. Can you give us examples of how what you learned (if anything) has affected your practice? [i.e., changed anything about the care your patients receive]

- Or examples of how what you learned could potentially lead to changes in the future?
- If someone was looking at your practice from the outside, where might they see the impact of these changes—i.e., how would these show up? Changes in cost of care, efficiency, quality, etc.?

16. Can you give any examples of how what you learned may have any impact on how you arrive at a diagnosis or make treatment decisions?

*Probe for:*

- Make you better able to diagnose conditions that otherwise wouldn't have been on your radar?
- Clarify how to diagnose or treat conditions you already knew about?
- Affect your confidence in your own knowledge in the area of diagnosis?

17. Did anything you learned or reviewed for the exam affect how you manage resources, for example, increase or reduce the tests you order, etc.?

- Any impact on referrals—conditions you refer to others, volume of referrals?

18. Other than what we've already discussed, did any of the information you reviewed for the exam reinforce what you already knew, or what you already do in practice? If so, what/how? If not, why not?

[Interjection point – check-in with co-interviewer, if present.]

## CONCLUDING QUESTIONS

19. Focusing on the exam—did anything about the feedback from the exam (such as your score) lead you to do or study anything more as a follow-up? (for example, seeing a question on an area where they didn't study or that framed an issue a little differently?)

*Probe for:*

- Specifics of anything they did to follow up, and why/how

20. In general, thinking about the overall exam process—the entire process of preparing for the exam, taking the exam, getting your score, and so forth—how did this affect your confidence in your own medical knowledge, and the way you keep up? (for example, “I really know my stuff”/“There are areas where I should refer out more”/“This was all irrelevant to my medical knowledge”)?

*Probe for:*

- Any effect this change/reinforcing of perspective might have had on their practice.

[Ask if not covered already.]

21. Again, thinking about the overall exam process—did anxiety about the exam affect what you studied, and/or the way you studied? If so, how?

*Probe for:*

- General feelings of anxiety around test taking

22. [Check-in with co-interviewer, if present—additional follow-up questions/anything to be expanded on.]

23. [If time allows—ask why they chose to participate in the study.]

<sup>a</sup>Participants were general internists and family physicians, working in the United States, who provide mainly outpatient primary care and who had taken an MOC exam within the last 6 months.