Computerized testing: what you need to know

Throw away your pencils -- taking an EMS exam in Texas now means a session at a computer. We've run several articles in this magazine over the past year about computerized testing and what it will mean. We've posted all that information on our website at www.tdh.state.tx.us/hcqs/ems. Click on "Computerized testing info." Below are the essentials – what you really need to know about NREMT testing.

What should everyone know about CBT?

- DSHS will not give any paper and pencil exams at the ECA, EMT, Intermediate or Paramedic Level after December 31, 2006.
- NREMT will not accept or grade any paper and pencil exams given after December 31, 2006.
- All Education Programs and Students must register with NREMT. The NREMT web address is www.nremt.org.
- Students began registering accounts and filing application after December 15, 2006.
- EMS Students taking an EMS Instructor course will call a local DSHS EMS field office to arrange EMS instructor exams.
- Pearson VUE is a separate entity that has an agreement with NREMT to give the exams. The Authorization to Test (ATT) is your permission slip to contact Pearson VUE to schedule your exam.
- The exam scheduling feature and email address used by DSHS were deactivated and no longer used as of January 1, 2007.

What should Texas EMS Education Programs know about CBT?

- Every program must go on-line to the NREMT web site and register (see page 22). Once you have registered, a notice will be sent to DSHS that you have registered your program. Once your program is acknowledged to be an approved program by DSHS, NR will be notified. If you have not registered your program, this must be done immediately.
- Once your program is approved by DSHS, NREMT will mail you a DVD about the computer based testing process.
- DSHS will no longer require course completion rosters at the ECA and EMT level. Coordinators should issue students an individual course completion certificate; these will be audited as needed by DSHS.
- THE NREMT computer system will create rosters that go to NREMT to verify course competition.
- Education Programs must register through NREMT then DSHS can approve them for CBT.
- The ECA and EMT practical (skills) testing are done within the education course. National registry representatives are still needed for advanced practical exams.
- The electronic verification of course completion does away with the need for education program medical director signatures.
- Be sure your students have the program name and program number you registered with NREMT.

What should EMS Students know about CBT?

- EMS Students must create an account with NREMT (see page 21). Once the account is established they can apply for registration and testing. Once the students Education Program verifies course completion they will get an Authorization to Test (ATT) that will allow the student to schedule with PV.
- If you do not show for an exam you must file another application and pay another fee. Candidates can change an appointment but each candidate must contact Pearson VUE directly to cancel or change an appointment to test. This must occur no less than 24 hours prior to the scheduled appointment or the candidate will be charged for the exam.
- If you started with a paper and pencil exam and must retest by computer based testing, your number of attempts start back at one with the computer based test. All of the other eligibility requirements and rules must be followed.
- Students must have two forms of identification when you go to the test center (examples: driver's license and credit/debit card; driver's license and social security card; passport and credit/debit card; or passport and social security card).
- Candidates who do not pass the exam will be able to reschedule another exam 14 days after an unsuccessful attempt, which is sooner than with pencil-and-paper examinations.

What should EMS Students upgrading to a new level of EMS Certification know about CBT?

- EMS Students must create an account with NREMT. Once the account is established they can apply for registration and testing. If they already have an account they can use the existing one. Once the students Education Program verifies course completion they will get an authorization to test that will allow the student to schedule with PV.
- Students must have two forms of identification when you go to the test center (examples: driver's license and credit/debit card; driver's license and social security card; passport and credit/debit card; or passport and social security card).

What Texas EMS renewal candidates need to know when choosing the written exam option?

- This option is still available. This assessment exam will be a CBT exam as well. We will use an exam developed for DSHS by NREMT and will follow the same process for the other CBT exams.
- When you create your account you will choose assessment exam.
- Exam results will be reported directly to DSHS.

What should the EMS Instructor Students know about CBT?

- DSHS is in the process of going forward with recommendations from GETAC on using the 2002 EMS Instructor Curriculum.
- EMS Students taking an EMS Instructor course will call a local DSHS EMS field office to arrange EMS instructor exams.
- This is a paper and pencil exam.
- The exam scheduling feature and email address used by DSHS will be deactivated and no longer used as of January 1, 2007.

What should Texas National Registry Representatives know about CBT?

- Education Programs will still need Representatives for advanced practical exams.
- The Representatives will follow the instructions issued by NREMT to report practical exam results.

Who do I contact if I have questions?

- Contact NREMT. The Community Relations Department will be able to assist you with additional questions during the transition to computer based testing.
- http://www.nremt.org/about/CBT_home.asp

Common Acronyms:

- DSHS – Department of State Health Services
- NREMT – National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians
- PV – Pearson-Vue
- CBT – Computer Based testing
- ATT – Authorization To Test

CBT vs. CAT

While these terms have been used interchangeably, there are differences between CBT and Computer-Adaptive Testing (CAT). CBT is simply a description of the method of testing. A computer-based test could be simply a mirror image of a so-called 'linear' pencil and paper test, where each candidate takes a test with the same test questions in the same order. Or it could be a computer-adaptive test, which adapts questions to the candidate's perceived knowledge. According to testing experts, CAT is a method of question selection for a candidate that allows for the most efficient testing of a candidate's knowledge in the shortest amount of time. For instance, if a candidate correctly answers a question, the computer will choose one slightly more difficult for the next question. This will continue until the candidate misses a question. The computer then asks an easier question. The reverse is true for a candidate with less ability. If a candidate continues to answer incorrectly, then the questions would become easier. The theory of CAT is that it will take fewer questions, answered incorrectly or correctly, to determine that the candidate possesses the required knowledge – or not. The end result is that candidates at the top end and low end of knowledge will have shorter tests. For those in the middle, it might take a bit longer for the computer to determine if the candidate has the knowledge to pass. As you might have guessed, there are no grades in CAT, simply a pass/fail notation.