Hospice and Palliative Medicine
Certification Examination Blueprint

**Purpose of the exam**

The exam is designed to evaluate the knowledge, diagnostic reasoning, and clinical judgment skills expected of the certified physician practicing in the broad domain of hospice and palliative medicine. The ability to make appropriate diagnostic and management decisions that have important consequences for patients will be assessed. The exam may require recognition of common as well as rare clinical problems for which patients may consult a certified physician practicing hospice and palliative medicine. The exam is developed jointly by the ABIM, the American Board of Anesthesiology, the American Board of Emergency Medicine, the American Board of Family Medicine, the American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology, the American Board of Pediatrics, the American Board of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology, the American Board of Radiology, and the American Board of Surgery.

**Exam content**

Exam content is determined by a pre-established blueprint, or table of specifications, which is reviewed annually and updated as needed for currency. Trainees, training program directors, and certified practitioners in the discipline are surveyed periodically to provide feedback and inform the blueprinting process.

The primary medical content categories of the blueprint are shown below, with the percentage assigned to each for a typical exam:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medical Content Category</th>
<th>% of Exam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approach to Care</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychosocial and Spiritual Considerations</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impending Death</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grief and Bereavement</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Management</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication and Teamwork</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical and Legal Decision Making</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prognostication and Natural History of Serious Illness</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exam questions in the content areas above may also address topics in pediatrics (approximately 10% of the exam) and clinical topics in medicine that are important to the practice of hospice and palliative medicine.
Exam format

The exam is composed of multiple-choice questions with a single best answer, predominantly describing patient scenarios. Questions ask about the work done (that is, tasks performed) by physicians in the course of practice:

- Making a diagnosis
- Ordering and interpreting results of tests
- Recommending treatment or other patient care
- Assessing risk, determining prognosis, and applying principles from epidemiologic studies
- Understanding the underlying pathophysiology of disease and basic science knowledge applicable to patient care

Clinical information presented may include patient photographs, radiographs, electrocardiograms, and other media to illustrate relevant patient findings.

A tutorial including examples of ABIM exam question format can be found at http://www.abim.org/exam/prepare.aspx.

The blueprint can be expanded for additional detail as shown below. Each primary medical content category is listed again, with the percentage of the exam devoted to this content area. Below each major category are the content subsections and their percentages within the exam. Please note: The percentages for each subsection describe content of a typical exam and are approximate; actual exam content may vary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach to Care</th>
<th>Approximate % of Exam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Components</td>
<td>9% of Exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Components</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family and patient as unit of care</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relief of symptoms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bereavement care</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to care/barriers to care</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other topics in components</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care settings</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inpatient</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outpatient</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other topics in care settings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospice Medicare benefit</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligibility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levels of care</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other topics in hospice Medicare benefit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other topics in approach to care</td>
<td>&lt;2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychosocial and Spiritual Considerations</th>
<th>Approximate % of Exam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychosocial considerations</td>
<td>11% of Exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychosocial considerations</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional responses to illness/coping</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural considerations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Socioeconomic Considerations
- Family Considerations
- Underlying Psychiatric Disorders
- Other topics in psychosocial considerations

### Spiritual Issues
- Meaning and Hope
- Spiritual Life
- Religious Beliefs and Practices
- Other topics in spiritual issues

### Impending Death

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manifestations</th>
<th>Approximate % of Exam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respiratory</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardiovascular</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neurological</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gastrointestinal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skin and mucous membranes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other topics in manifestations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prognostication</th>
<th>Approximate % of Exam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use of palliative performance scale</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other topics in prognostication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management</th>
<th>Approximate % of Exam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmacologic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychosocial</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other topics in management of impending death</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Other topics in impending death <2%

### Grief and Bereavement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grief and Bereavement</th>
<th>Approximate % of Exam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anticipatory grief</td>
<td>&lt;2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normal grief and bereavement patterns</td>
<td>&lt;2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Problematic grief and bereavement patterns | 2% |
| Causes | |
| Suicide risk in the bereaved | |
| Other topics in problematic grief and bereavement patterns | |

| Loss history | <2% |
| Therapeutic interventions | <2% |
| Needs of bereaved minor children | <2% |

### Medical Management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medical Management</th>
<th>Approximate % of Exam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pain</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concepts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pathophysiology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment (about 4.5% of the exam)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management (about 10.5% of the exam)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers to pain relief</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other topics in pain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other common conditions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anorexia and cachexia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weakness and fatigue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dry mouth and oral lesions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyspnea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nausea and vomiting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dysphagia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diarrhea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constipation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delirium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myoclonus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dysuria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edema</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ascites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiccups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleep disorders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pruritus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incontinence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional common conditions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Urgent medical conditions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spinal cord compression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypercalcemia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased intracranial pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fractures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seizures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delirium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superior vena cava syndrome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Device loss or malfunction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hemorrhage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowel obstruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acute airway obstruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other topics in urgent medical conditions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Additional management strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Radiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemotherapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehabilitative therapies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complementary and alternative medicine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other topics in additional management strategies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Palliative sedation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eligibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medication and techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other topics in palliative sedation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discontinuation of technological support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respiratory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renal replacement therapy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cardiac
Organ donation
Other topics in discontinuation of technological support

Other topics in medical management  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication and Teamwork</th>
<th>Approximate % of Exam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication skills</strong></td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication techniques</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivering bad news</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death notification</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Autopsy</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Organ or tissue donation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other topics in communication skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family-centered approach</strong></td>
<td>&lt;2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family systems theory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling techniques</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family conference</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifestyle considerations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other topics in family-centered approach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dynamics of interdisciplinary care</strong></td>
<td>&lt;2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roles and functions of team members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective teamwork</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict resolution skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional boundaries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other topics in dynamics of interdisciplinary care</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physician leadership</strong></td>
<td>&lt;2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultation and co-management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality improvement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team member</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other topics in physician leadership</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Other topics in communication and teamwork  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethical and Legal Decision Making</th>
<th>Approximate % of Exam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Decision making</strong></td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed consent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision making capacity/competency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surrogate decision making</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advance directives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patient/family values</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principle of double effect</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documentation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other topics in decision making</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Patient rights</strong></td>
<td>&lt;2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privacy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment refusal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidentiality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Safety
- Other topics in patient rights

### Ethics of physician-patient relationship
- Non-abandonment
- Truth-telling
- Other topics in ethics of physician-patient relationship

### Professionalism
- Burnout
- Other topics in professionalism

### Controversies
- Futility
- Artificial nutrition and hydration
- Physician aid in dying
- Access to care/rationing
- Withdrawal of interventions
- Other topics in controversies

### States of reduced consciousness
- Minimally conscious state
- Vegetative state
- Death by neurologic criteria
- Coma
- Other topics in states of reduced consciousness

### Other topics in ethical and legal decision making

### Prognostication and Natural History of Serious Illness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Approximate % of Exam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cancer</td>
<td>&lt;2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardiovascular disease</td>
<td>&lt;2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pulmonary disease</td>
<td>&lt;2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-organ dysfunction syndrome</td>
<td>&lt;2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stroke</td>
<td>&lt;2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dementia</td>
<td>&lt;2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frailty</td>
<td>&lt;2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis</td>
<td>&lt;2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perinatal and infant death</td>
<td>&lt;2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renal failure</td>
<td>&lt;2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unintentional injury and trauma</td>
<td>&lt;2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pediatric neurological conditions</td>
<td>&lt;2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other topics in prognostication and natural history of serious illness</td>
<td>&lt;2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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