

## Frequently Asked Questions about Standard Setting

### **Q. How is the pass rate set for ABIM exams?**

- A. ABIM does *not* set a pass rate that predetermines the percent of examinees that pass or fail the exam. Instead, ABIM uses the Angoff method, a well-established, evidence-based approach in the testing industry to set a passing standard. This method uses a process which sets an absolute passing score based on the content of the exam (i.e., at the question level) and how much the examinee knows rather than on examinees' performance relative to their peers taking the exam. In other words, the pass-fail decision is based on mastery of content rather than how an examinee ranks relative to other examinees.

### **Q. Why do first-taker pass rates sometimes change from year to year within a specialty area?**

- A. An important factor in the pass rate is the composition of the examinee group. Pass rates may vary from cohort to cohort, a reflection of differences in average ability in the cohorts. Another reason for changes in pass rates is the application of a new passing standard. ABIM test committees periodically review the passing standard for appropriateness; and passing standards may be reset through the Angoff method. The eventual pass rate for most ABIM specialty area exams is approximately 96%, so most examinees are eventually successful once they master the content sufficient to achieve a passing score.

### **Q. Why do first-taker pass rates differ among internal medicine specialty areas?**

- A. Each specialty area uses the same Angoff method to set the passing standard. However, the composition of examinees and the content vary, and the standard is based on mastery of the content in that area. The content is defined through a detailed blueprint that is available online. The eventual pass rate for most ABIM specialty area exams is approximately 96%, so most examinees are eventually successful once they master the content sufficient to achieve a passing score.