

RACGP Assessment handbook for candidates

Assessment
preparation



**THE ROYAL AUSTRALIAN
COLLEGE OF
GENERAL PRACTITIONERS**

The college assessment processes aim to facilitate learning so that practitioners will be actively involved in continuing professional development beyond the assessment process.

The first question a candidate should ask is “What is Australian general practice?”. The answer to this question will provide insight into the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are relevant to everyday practice, and therefore the examination. The curriculum was written to act as a guide to the knowledge, skills and learning experiences that are necessary for competent, unsupervised general practice. For this reason many candidates find it useful to refer to the curriculum to guide their preparation for the exam. The curriculum can be viewed at www.racgp.org.au/curriculum.

The domains of general practice that form the basis of the examination matrix are the same as those used in selecting questions and cases for the college examination.

The frequency and patterns of problems as they present to general practice should also be considered during exam preparation. This is information gathered from studies such as the BEACH (Bettering the Evaluation and Care of Health) study used to design the examination matrix. The questions used in the college examination aim to reflect the frequency of problems as they occur in Australian general practice. Candidates may therefore find it useful to compare their practice profile with that of other practitioners by reviewing their practice using a log diary of, for example, 100 consecutive patients.

Comparing your practice profile with the BEACH data may assist you to identify learning needs. For example, if you see very few paediatric cases, you may wish to undertake further study in paediatrics in order to prepare for the exam. This study may include organising some sessions in a facility with a paediatric population, as well as reading journals and attending lectures and workshops. A more formal method to review your practice profile is to take part in BEACH. See *Figure 1a* and *Figure 1b* (‘The college examination matrix’) at the end of this document.

In approaching any assessment it is important to understand not only the format, but also the objectives of each of the segments. By better understanding what is being assessed in each segment, preparation (and actual practice) can be ‘geared’ along those lines. Each segment has different objectives:

- the applied knowledge test assesses the breadth and depth of contextual knowledge required to enter unsupervised general practice
- the key feature problems assesses clinical decision making skills
- the objective structured clinical examination assesses applied knowledge, clinical reasoning, clinical skills, communication skills and professional attitudes in the context of consultations and patient examinations.

Training for general practice occurs in the work setting, not in a library. Similarly, preparation for an examination of general practice should occur in the practice setting. The examination does not solely assess book knowledge. Rather, it aims to assess how this knowledge is applied to everyday situations involving patient care. The actual processes of patient care and doctors’ attitudes are also important aspects of this examination.

**The college examination assesses the competencies that
candidates would use in actual practice**

By honestly answering these and many more related questions, candidates can become more aware of their own performance in general practice and change any aspects they consider appropriate. By performing well in actual practice it becomes easier to translate these behaviours into the examination situations. It may be helpful to invite a trusted colleague to provide constructive feedback on your consultations: ask them to spend time watching you consult, either in the practice or by videotape (such methods would of course require informed patient consent).

Pre-examination courses

Each RACGP faculty and subfaculty provides information and practice opportunities for candidates during a pre-examination course. Dates and venues are advertised in faculty newsletters. Please contact your state faculty for further information. Contact details are available at www.racgp.org.au/contact.

Tutorial assistance

Candidates seeking additional advice or assistance in preparing for the college examination should directly approach the assessment panel chair in their state or territory, who will determine the level of additional support any individual candidate receives. The assessment panel chair may delegate the actual task of tutoring to selected mentors willing to assist in this preparation. Tutorial assistance may include examination process issues and explanations, but will not include current or past examination material.

Study groups

Although the practice setting provides the best preparation, some candidates find it useful to form study groups. Such groups typically comprise three to six candidates living in close proximity to each other. Registrars interested in forming study groups should contact their regional training provider. Other candidates should contact their state faculty office.

QA&CPD program

Many activities that are promoted through the RACGP Quality Assurance and Continuing Professional Development (QA&CPD) program may also be useful to candidates as they prepare for the exam. These include clinical audits, clinical attachments, lectures, workshops, small group learning and online learning programs. While this is not a comprehensive list, it indicates the breadth of educational material available to candidates.

Candidates interested in accessing further QA&CPD activities can contact the QA&CPD unit in their state or search for activities online at www.racgp.org.au/qacalendar.

check

The RACGP **check** program is one of the longest running and most successful self education programs for Australian general practice. **check** is a versatile self education program and QA&CPD activity that provides a range of cases written by expert clinicians. Each case includes a brief clinical scenario followed by a series of questions designed to bring out the important issues for GPs to consider in the clinical history, examination, investigation and/or management of a problem. Membership of the RACGP provides a subscription to **check** at no cost.

Previous **check** programs are available in print and CD-ROM format and programs published in previous trienniums are available at reduced prices. Order forms are available from the RACGP website at www.racgp.org.au/check.

gplearning: online QA&CPD activities

gplearning is the RACGP's interactive online CPD education service containing over 200 activities on a wide range of subject areas. Category 1 and Category 2 activities are available. Financial members of the RACGP automatically have access to *gplearning*. For more information, please contact *gplearning* on 1800 284 789, email contactus@gplearning.com.au or visit www.gplearning.com.au

Available resources

The RACGP has developed an online assessment resources facility that is available to enrolled candidates. The online assessment preparation program is a series of assessment activities designed to give participants experience in the assessment activities utilised in the college examination and PBA. The various modules of the online program also provide valuable learning guidance and feedback on performance in the different assessment segments.

Further details of how to access this valuable resource will be provided with confirmation of enrolment.

Practice papers for the applied knowledge test and key feature problems have been prepared to allow candidates to familiarise themselves with the format of the papers and the style of questions. These practice papers are available through the online assessment preparation program at www.racgp.org.au/exam/assessment/examination/preparation

Other resources may be purchased at most medical book suppliers. Some are available through the RACGP at a discounted rate for members and may also be available for limited loan through the RACGP John Murtagh Library, undergraduate and postgraduate libraries. To contact the RACGP John Murtagh library phone 03 8699 0519, fax 03 8699 0403, email library@racgp.org.au or visit www.racgp.org.au/library.

Figure 1a. The college examination matrix – domains of general practice

1. Communication skills and the doctor patient relationship	
1.1	The general practitioner as a therapeutic agent
1.2	Patient-centredness
1.3	Establishing rapport
1.4	Communication with patients' significant others
1.5	Consultation models
1.6	Counselling skills
1.7	Advocacy role for the individual patient
1.8	Interaction of family dynamics with health and illness
1.9	Communication with patients from differing cultural backgrounds
1.10	Communication with special needs groups
1.11	Individual and opportunistic health education promotion
1.12	Care coordination, referrals and networking
1.13	Written communication skills
2. Applied professional knowledge and skills	
2.1	Knowledge of medical conditions – common
2.2	Knowledge of medical conditions – treatable
2.3	Knowledge of medical conditions – preventable
2.4	Knowledge of medical conditions – dysfunctional, disabling or life-threatening
2.5	Knowledge of medical conditions – uncommon, but serious
2.6	Knowledge of medical conditions – masquerading illnesses
2.7	Approach to undifferentiated problems
2.8	Information gathering
2.9	Physical examination skills
2.10	Procedural skills
2.11	Clinical decision making
2.12	Continuity of care
2.13	Integration of care
2.14	Cost-effective treatment and investigations
2.15	Critical appraisal

3. Population health and the context of general practice	
3.1	Demographic and epidemiological issues – health needs of special groups
3.2	Knowledge of public health problems
3.3	Population based preventive strategies
3.4	Cultural aspects of health care
3.5	Sociopolitical dimensions of health
3.6	Advocacy role in the community
3.7	Patient context – family, work and significant others
3.8	Community resources
4. Professional and ethical role	
4.1	Special duty of care
4.2	Maintenance of professional standards
4.3	Adherence to contemporary ethical principles
4.4	Reflective skills and self appraisal
4.5	Lifelong learning and continuous professional development
4.6	Teaching role
4.7	Research, evaluation & audit skills
4.8	Professional networks
4.9	Self and family care
5. Organisational and legal dimensions	
5.1	Arrangements for availability and accessibility
5.2	Safety netting
5.3	Screening and recall systems
5.4	Information management – patient and practice
5.5	Information technology
5.6	Medical records
5.7	Legal responsibilities
5.8	Practice management

Figure 1b. The college examination matrix – frequency and patterns of problems presenting to general practice

ICPC chapter heading	BEACH (%)
General	26.2%
Respiratory	13.5%
Musculoskeletal	10.1%
Skin	10.1%
Cardiovascular	7.3%
Digestive	6.8%
Psychological	5.1%
Neurological	3.1%
Female genital	3.4%
Endocrine	4.2%
Ear	2.4%
Reproductive	2.1%
Eye	1.6%
Urological	1.6%
Blood	0.9%
Social	0.7%
Male genital	0.8%

Age group (years)	BEACH (%)
0–4	4.5%
5–14	5.5%
15–24	9.5%
25–44	23.4%
45–64	28.1%
65–74	12.6%
Over 75	14.7%
Gender	BEACH (%)
Male	43%
Female	57%