Specialty Certificate Examination in Neurology

Just when you thought you’d sat enough exams, another one comes along! This aim of this article is to provide a brief overview of the Specialty Certificate Examination (SCE) in Neurology. Much of the information below and further handy hints for success can be found on the ABNT website and MRCP (UK) website.

Background

The SCE in Neurology was formally introduced in May 2009. Attainment of this examination is now compulsory for trainees who began their specialist training in or after August 2007 in order to obtain their Certificate of Completion of Training (CCT). On successful completion of the exam, trainees are awarded a specialty certificate and are eligible for the title MRCP (UK) (Neurology) when recommended for CCT.

A standard-setting procedure is used to determine the passmark for the exam. This is based on the perception of a group of neurology specialists on how difficult the exam material is and further adjustments are made after the examination to take into account variability in performance. In 2010, 75 candidates undertook the exam. The passmark was 53%. 47 of the 55 UK candidates (i.e. 85.5%) and 8 of the 20 non-UK candidates passed.

Eligibility and timing

The MRCP (UK) website states that to be eligible to take the exam, UK candidates must have: successful completion of all parts of the MRCP (UK) and/or been appointed to a substantive STR programme and awarded a National Training Number (NTN). This means that trainees who possess an NTN but are currently on out of programme experience (e.g. doing research), or trainees who don’t yet have an NTN but do have MRCP (UK) are eligible to sit the exam. However, this situation may well change and we would advise those without an NTN to contact the college prior to applying for the exam (see end of article for email address). Trainees who began their specialist training before 2007 are not required to undertake this exam.

It is recommended the exam is undertaken before your final year of registrar training, ideally in your penultimate year although, as noted above, it can be done earlier.

Format

This is a computerised exam with a best-of-5 format. Most questions take the form of a clinical scenario. It is divided into two papers, each comprising 100 questions. Each paper lasts three hours and both are done on the same day. There is no negative marking.

Practicalities

The exam is held once a year. The date and deadline for application can be found on the MRCP UK website. At present the cost is £825 for 2011, which is an increase from the cost in 2010 (£800). The high cost results from the rigorous process for question-setting combined with the small number of candidates: even at this price the College anticipates making a loss. Some departments may provide you with money towards the exam so it is worth checking beforehand. If you fail the exam in 2011 you are eligible for a free second attempt in 2012. However from 2012, you will need to pay the full cost of the exam again to resit.

You can apply for the exam online on the MRCP (UK) website. To do this, you will need your RCP code number. You need to register for an online My MRCP (UK) account and pay the fee. You will then be sent a confirmatory email. Then you can book a place at an allocated Pearson Vue test centre.

Revision

In theory, knowledge for the exam is meant to be acquired during your clinical training through your inpatient and outpatient work, grand rounds and training days. For this reason, you may feel more comfortable sitting the exam during the later stages of your training. Most people who have sat the exam successfully would agree you do need to revise for it. In particular, it is worth remembering the exam includes interpretation of neuroimaging (CT, MRI) and neurophysiology (EEG, NCS/EMG). Good luck!

Further information:

Relevant links:
- Exam application link: http://www.mrcpuk.org/SCE/Pages/Application.aspx
- Sample questions: http://www.mrcpuk.org/SiteCollectionDocuments/ SCE/NeurologySampleQs.pdf
- Email enquiries to: SCE.queries@rcplondon.ac.uk
- ABNT website: http://www.theabn.org/Members/ABNT.aspx
- ABNT SCE advice: http://theabn.org/Publications/AdviceforSCE.aspx

Further reading:
- Practical Neurology journal, especially the 'Bare Essentials' series
- Clinical Neurology. 3rd Edition edited by Fowler and Spadding
- Path to the Examination of the Peripheral Nervous System
- Neurology: A Queen Square Textbook Clarke, Howard, Rossor, Shorvon

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