

Recent CLEAR Quick Poll Results

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CLEAR periodically issues “Quick Poll” surveys asking members about their credentialing practices, policies, and issues. These Quick Polls are not designed as scientific studies but allow us to gather snapshot data regarding current practices in credentialing. CLEAR administered a Quick Poll in July of 2020 when it became evident that the Covid-19 pandemic was going to be disrupting the work of regulatory bodies, licensure/registration authorities, and certification bodies for more than the short term. The poll was designed to assess how regulators were responding to the pandemic, what changes they had implemented, what they anticipated for the future.

Questions:

As a result of the emergence of COVID-19, did your organization make any changes to the way you assess your candidates for licensure/registration?

- Yes
- No

Are you planning on implementing these changes permanently, regardless of the status of the pandemic?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

If you answered yes or no, please describe the rationale for the decision. If you responded not sure, what factors will affect your decision?

Number of responses: 85

Results:

Of the 85 respondents who answered the poll, two-thirds (66%, N=56) indicated that they had made changes in response to the pandemic while one-third (34%, N=29) said they had not. Despite the fact that the poll questions were specifically about the way organizations had changed their assessment for licensure or registration, respondents took the opportunity to discuss changes not only in assessment but also described other organizational adjustments they had made in response to the pandemic.

Respondent organizations listed a number of changes to their assessment processes in response to the pandemic. In some cases, they had been required to make these changes to be in compliance with their jurisdiction’s Covid-related rules. Respondents mentioned the following types of changes specifically related to assessment or examination:

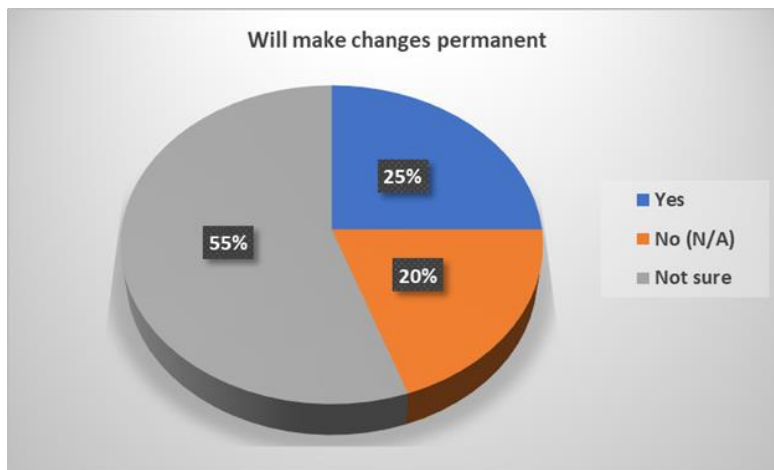
- the cancellation or postponement of exams (especially for clinical, oral, or skills demonstrations);
- modifying clinical testing environments to account for distancing requirements and providing PPE as needed;
- implementing computer-based testing or accelerating previous plans to transition from paper and pencil to CBT;

- in contrast, one group indicated it had moved to a paper and pencil administration due to limited seating at computer-based locations;
- increasing the number of locations for testing and extending testing windows;
- extending deadlines for testing;
- in some jurisdictions, waiving clinical skills testing for essential healthcare workers;
- using of online live remote or virtual proctoring, including for clinical observations.

We had to change our dates and postpone exams into the fall when we hope social distancing will be a little less stringent.

Respondents also described a range of changes not related to assessment *per se*. Many organizations described changes in how they handled administrative responsibilities, particularly those related to documentation. Some moved to e-submission of documentation (including such documents as transcripts and employment verifications). Organizations extended or postponed deadlines for testing. Waived reciprocity to get more healthcare workers into the field; did not require criminal background checks because they could not obtain these in a timely manner; and changed the way they confirmed applicant identify by using virtual communications rather than live interviews

Respondents also indicated whether they planned to make the changes permanent, regardless of the course of the pandemic. Of those who had indicated they made changes, 25% (N=14) said Yes, 20% said No (N=11), and 55% (N=31) said they were not sure.



Similar to the responses to whether they had made changes, organizations discussed both their assessment processes as well as other organizational changes. Among the reasons for making changes permanent were increased efficiencies, particularly in relation to administrative activities such as record-keeping; as one respondent stated, "Eventually, we aim to be completely paper-free with registration and registration renewal." In addition, for organizations that had already intended to make changes (for example, from paper and pencil testing to CBT, reduction in exam length, or moving to remote proctoring), the pandemic merely accelerated the pace of the change. One respondent noted that changes were saving not only the organization money but also saving candidates money and travel time and costs.

On the other hand, many organizations indicated that they would be reverting to previous administrative processes and procedures once the pandemic eased. Many respondents indicated that changes were driven by state of emergency declarations and they would return to previous processes for both testing and administrative functions once those had lifted. The resumption of clinical testing was mentioned in regard to assessment, and criminal background checks and fingerprinting were among were mentioned in the context of public protection. As one respondent stated, “A background check and examinations to assess basic professional competence are necessary and we will return to requiring successful completion of those requirements prior to issuance of a license when those services are more readily available”.

Most respondents who had made changes were unsure if the changes would become permanent. Almost half of those who were unsure did not provide a reason for their response. Of those who provided an explanation, in many cases their “Not sure” was because the person completing the Quick Poll was not the decision-maker, and the ultimate determination would be made by a higher-up, the organizational Board, or the jurisdictional regulatory authority. One respondent mentioned that seat time issues might ease, making the need for online testing lessen, and another discussed how live remote proctoring might be viewed by accrediting bodies as a factor in their decision-making. Some respondents expressed concerns that safety might be compromised due to the changes that had been made.



Clearly, the Covid-19 pandemic has caused tremendous disruption in how regulatory organizations and bodies conduct their essential functions. Unfortunately, the optimism of the poll's mid-summer respondents that things might go back to normal sooner rather than later may have been premature. Some of the “temporary” changes may become more entrenched as the pandemic continues to impact the work of regulatory bodies. Adjustment by testing companies to provide safer onsite testing may cause some organizations to return back to using those facilities, and improvements in online testing and live remote proctoring may permit other organizations to continue pivoting to this testing modality. In sum, the regulatory environment has been profoundly affected by the pandemic, and regulatory bodies have shifted focus, changed policies and procedures, and met the challenges in a number of ways, some of which may permanently alter the landscape.