

## ABMS Meeting on Exam Security

*David A. Mankoff, M.D., Ph.D., Chairman*



The ABMS held a meeting on exam security in Chicago on June 3, 2011. The purpose of this meeting was to review issues related to board examination security, and particularly exam cheating, for all member boards. A number of excellent presentations covered topics that included stories of organized cheating on some examination and how cheating was discovered, question copyrighting and other protections, basic and advanced security approaches, and the science of “data forensics” using to uncover cheating. Perhaps the most fascinating part of the presentation were stories where investigators uncovered private, for-profit board review courses that had stolen exam questions, in many cases using examinees to systematically retain questions and pass them back to the review courses. An equally interesting story was how data forensics were able to uncover patterns in exam answers that suggested cheating, leading to many of the discoveries.

Much of what was discussed at the ABMS meeting applies to larger boards, where the financial incentive for creating a blackmarket for exam questions is greater. While there is little financial incentive for similar activities related to smaller boards such as the ABNM, some basic common-sense approaches can help protect the security of board examinations:

1. It is important to remind examinees that sharing questions from the exam is forbidden. It is equally important to make sure test-takers are aware of the consequences of cheating, including implication for their certification in the specialty.
2. Copyrighting the questions is relatively simple and can protect boards in case their questions are copied, especially if there are legal actions related to exam security and cheating.

Both of these issues were reviewed by the Examination Committee, including a review of the statement ABNM examinees are required to sign to be able to take the CE and MOC exams. These issues were also discussed at the summer ABNM meeting. The take home message to ABNM diplomates is to remind them (and their trainees) that examination questions are not to be shared nor distributed, and that any knowledge of such activity should be reported to the ABNM.

