

The NAMS Competency Exam

Carolyn J. Crandall, MD, MS

The need for menopause education has never been greater. The numbers of aging women are increasing worldwide to a record level. Every day in just North America alone, more than 6,000 women reach menopause.^{1,2} Menopause presents an ideal opportunity to change and improve health practices and enhance quality of life for women. In turn, increasing numbers of healthcare providers are incorporating a menopause-related component into their clinical practices. Moreover, in the research arena, new findings continue to enhance our knowledge while conflicting findings present us with challenges of how to appropriately inform women and positively impact their health decisions through menopause and beyond.

In 2002, The North American Menopause Society (NAMS) responded to a growing need to establish some essential standards for healthcare providers who were treating peri- and postmenopausal women. These standards were meant to ensure that women at this transitional time would receive the highest possible quality of clinical care. The Society thus began developing a rigorous, periodic competency examination for licensed healthcare practitioners in a wide variety of disciplines (including

physicians, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, and pharmacists), which would validate their expertise in this area of women's health. Passing the examination would earn them the credential of "NAMS Menopause Practitioner."

A recent *JAMA* commentary says: "Research suggests that, on average, clinical skills tend to decline over time; a meta-analysis by Choudry and Fletcher illustrates that practice does not make perfect and supports the argument that physicians must engage in contin-

uous professional development...to retain competency."³

Hundreds of licensed practitioners around the world have now taken the Menopause Practitioner competency examination, a multiple-choice instrument focusing on a well-defined body of knowledge representative of professional practice, created by NAMS. Almost 600 practitioners currently hold this prestigious credential.

The credential's benefits include those that are tangible—such as the possibility of more patient referrals, job promotion, or higher salaries—and, perhaps more important, those benefits that are not as tangible, such as learning and incorporating new knowledge, which requires that providers continue their professional development and be certified for the competency they achieve from this education. The NAMS credential also affords enhanced professional credibility and the personal satisfaction of providing patients with the best care possible.

"The examination is in compliance with two key points in the NAMS Mission and Vision Statement: to promote education for healthcare providers that increases understanding of menopause, and to improve quality of life for peri- and postmenopausal women," says Wulf

H. Utian, MD, PhD, DSc(Med), NAMS Executive Director and Credentialed NAMS Menopause Practitioner.

Recognition of Competency

Those who pass the examination receive a certificate of added qualification that displays the 3-year period of the credential, plus suggestions on how to promote this accomplishment within the community. The credential provides valuable assistance to women in locating health-care providers with expertise in menopause through an up-to-date list on the Society's Web site (<http://www.menopause.org/consref.aspx>). Certificants also receive a lapel pin that distinguishes them as uniquely qualified to serve women at this time of life.

Examination Outline

The original contents of the examination consisted of a compilation of the results of a national role-delineation study that surveyed practitioners about what they be-

lieved was crucial knowledge for treating women during peri- and postmenopause. And every year thereafter, the examination has been updated and expanded by committees of renowned experts in the field, assisted by experienced testing professionals. A total of 100 multiple-choice questions about recall, application and analysis of clinical situations are included, broken down approximately as 30% epidemiology, 25% basic science and 45% clinical care. The content outline is presented below:

Physiology—Normal (15%)

Terminology/demographics
Hypothalamic-pituitary-ovarian axis
Receptor activity
Endocrine changes
Perimenopause
Postmenopause physical changes/
normal symptomatology

Physiology—Abnormal (15%)

Premature menopause
Induced menopause
Pelvic pathology
Other

Health disorders of peri-/postmenopausal women (25%)

Sexual function
Skeletal
Cardiovascular
Urinary tract
Central nervous system
Sleep
Endocrine
Arthritis
Cancer

Clinical evaluation (15%)

History/identification of risk factors
Sexual history
Physical examination
Diagnostic and screening tests

Therapeutic options (30%)

Lifestyle modification
Nonprescription therapies
Prescription drugs
Complementary and
alternative medicine
Counseling

Examination Objectives

The NAMS Menopause Practitioner should be able to do the following:

- Define menopause-related terminology.
- Discuss endocrinological and physical changes associated with reproductive and physiologic aging.
- Identify significant risk factors for diseases that can result from lowered ovarian hormone levels.
- Interpret physical, laboratory and diagnostic findings as they relate to treatment decisions.
- Address psychosocial issues, including diversity.
- Comprehend the main components of obtaining a general health history and performing an appropriate physical examination.
- Select appropriate laboratory and diagnostic studies.
- Describe current research regarding the use of pharmacologic as well as complementary and alternative medicine treatments for menopause-related conditions.
- Develop recommended lifestyle, nonprescription and prescription risk reduction and treatment strategies for menopause-related symptoms and disease.
- Provide each patient with education to make informed deci-

Stats & Facts

- 86% of current NAMS Menopause Practitioners were NAMS members when they took the examination.
- 67.8% of Menopause Practitioners are physicians and 20.4% are nurse practitioners.
- 88.1% of Menopause Practitioners are from the United States and 8.2% are from Canada.

sions regarding health promotion and illness prevention.

- Recognize when referrals to specialized services are appropriate.
- Encourage acceptance and long-term adherence to an individualized healthcare plan.
- Develop appropriate counseling strategies that lead to positive lifestyle changes for women during and after menopause.

Who Can Apply

To be eligible to sit for NAMS Menopause Practitioner competency examination, candidates must be licensed healthcare professionals, including (among others) the following specialists:

- nurses
- nurse midwives
- nurse practitioners
- pharmacists
- physicians
- physician assistants
- psychologists

When to Apply

The examination is offered twice a year.

In the spring, it is offered at 12 convenient locations in the United States and Canada.

In the fall, the examination is offered just prior to the NAMS Annual Meeting—this year, on September 24, 2008, in Orlando, FL. The application deadline is June 13, 2008.

How to Apply

To apply, visit the NAMS Web site (www.menopause.org/compexam.html) to find a copy of the *2008 Candidate Handbook*, which provides all pertinent information, including

What Your Colleagues Are Saying

“The NAMS Menopause Practitioner credential is the standard by which menopause-focused practices are measured.”

James A. Simon, MD, CCD, FACOG

Clinical Professor

George Washington University

Medical Director

Women's Health & Research Consultants

Washington, DC

President, 2003–2004 NAMS Board of Trustees

Credentialed NAMS Menopause Practitioner

“As an educator of health professionals and the public, it is crucial to keep up-to-date with the latest menopause information. Earning and maintaining the NAMS Menopause Practitioner credential is proof of this. I wear my lapel pin with pride.”

Elizabeth Contestabile, RN, BScN

Nurse Educator

Shirley E. Greenberg Women's Health Centre

The Ottawa Hospital

Ottawa, ON, Canada

Member, 2007–2008 NAMS Board of Trustees

Credentialed NAMS Menopause Practitioner

“When patients select their physician or healthcare provider, it is largely subjective. The NAMS Menopause Practitioner qualification provides consumers with an objective assessment tool to aid in this process.”

David F. Archer, MD

Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology

Director, Conrad Clinical Research Center

Eastern Virginia Medical School

Norfolk, VA

President, 1997–1998 NAMS Board of Trustees

Credentialed NAMS Menopause Practitioner

“Our practice has expanded, thanks to my added qualification as a NAMS Menopause Practitioner. Women choose me over others in the area because they saw me listed on the NAMS Web site.”

Risa Kagan, MD

Clinical Professor

*Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology,
and Reproductive Sciences*

University of California, San Francisco

East Bay Physicians Medical Group

Berkeley, CA

Member, 2007–2008 NAMS Board of Trustees

Credentialed NAMS Menopause Practitioner

eligibility requirements, examination policies, examination content outline and an examination application for 2008.

The examination fee is \$200 for NAMS members and \$400 for non-members—another great reason to become a NAMS member.

How to Study

NAMS has published many resources and clinical practice materials that may be helpful in preparing for the examination, but does not provide a “study guide.” The Society’s Web site lists all the available NAMS educational materials and events. If needed, healthcare providers may wish to seek out additional information from other sources.

Credential Maintenance

The NAMS Menopause Practitioner credential is valid for a period of 3 years. For example, receiving the credential at any time during calendar year 2008 means it must be maintained by December 31, 2011.

There are two ways to maintain your Menopause Practitioner credential:

1. by submitting the appropriate continuing education hours
2. by reexamination

To maintain the credential through continuing education, one must provide proof that 45 credit hours were earned between the date the credential was received and the date of the credential expiration. Of these 45 hours, 30 must have been awarded by NAMS. More maintenance information is provided on the Society’s Web site (www.menopause.org/MPmaintainapp08.pdf).

**To maintain
your expertise as
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NAMS Menopause
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Why Now?

As the preeminent scientific organization addressing menopause, NAMS is committed to quality education for professionals. Knowledge about and the need to manage menopause are increasing at a phenomenal pace. To maintain your expertise as a provider of good health for midlife women, studying for the examination and becoming a NAMS Menopause Practitioner are the most affirmative actions you can take.

Make 2008 the year you become a NAMS credentialed Menopause Practitioner and a part of a prestigious group of health professionals. Demonstrate your mastery to your peers and proudly show your patients that you have proven competence in this growing field of women’s health—with credentials

from the world’s leading provider of accurate, scientific information about menopause and beyond.

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Dr. Crandall reports no potential conflicts related to the content of this article.

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3. Holmboe ES, Lipner R, Greiner A. Assessing quality of care: knowledge matters. *JAMA* 2008;299:338-340.