



An Assessment of the NCCPA Survey Gathering Feedback from Certified PAs on the Proposed New Recertification Model

February 12, 2016

On February 10, NCCPA issued an online survey to solicit PA feedback regarding the proposed recertification exam model and the current PANRE and CME requirements for certification maintenance. The survey also asks for general input about the proposed model as compared to the current PANRE.

To ensure you have all of the information you need if you do decide to take the survey, AAPA asked an independent researcher with a PhD in survey design to review the survey. Their assessment determined that the survey instrument may not be what most PAs expected and that the survey instrument itself is somewhat biased.

According to NCCPA, one foundational principle of its proposed model is to support the delivery of high quality, affordable and accessible healthcare, a priority for all PAs. Yet, the questionnaire does not gauge respondents' perspectives on the most effective processes and/or tool(s) to accomplish this task. It only asks respondents to rate the current model (CME and PANRE) and the proposed model (CME, periodic general take-home tests, and proctored specialty exam).

This speaks to the challenge of opinion surveys, as opposed to fact/data collection surveys. Opinion surveys, such as this one, tend to simplify choices in a way that could be misleading. A complex topic like this does not lend itself to being broken down into a simple "do you want this" or "do want that"? The way questions are worded, the options that are left off of lists of alternatives, what adjectives are used or not used – all of these things, and more, can influence the way people respond.

The NCCPA presents all of the "positive arguments" for the new proposal and then asks questions about it; it doesn't present any of the potential objections. Similarly, it presents the only choices as the current model vs. the NCCPA proposal, and asks about the benefits of each. But it doesn't give the respondent the opportunity to answer questions about the negative aspects of either. Nor does it give the respondent the opportunity to consider or offer other alternatives.

In sum, our concerns about the survey tool include:

- This is not an instrument to measure feedback. It is largely designed to arrive at one of two conclusions.
 - Support of the proposed recertification exam.
 - Support of the current PANRE model.

- The questions are generally structured to elicit favorable responses.
 - For example, the survey probes into participant perceptions of the benefits of the current PANRE and the proposed model. However, there is not a reciprocal question regarding the drawbacks/negatives.
 - Some questions use subjective language that can be biasing.
- Some questions use subjective language that can be biasing.
- All of the questions are closed-ended until the conclusion of the survey, when respondents are given the opportunity to communicate comments or suggestions.
 - Respondents who use the concluding opportunity to deliver feedback and comments to NCCPA will have already supplied responses to the survey's narrowly-focused questions.

We encourage all PAs to be thoughtful when considering this survey and your response. If you do decide to take the survey, make sure to take the opportunity to submit your comments at the end of the survey.

AAPA urges all PAs to provide comments, concerns and feedback to NCCPA and to share your views with other PAs. You can submit your comments and concerns via email to NCCPA through newpanre@nccpa.net and cc AAPA at recertificationcomments@aapa.org.

