

Demystifying and Dominating The Oral Boards

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Background

The American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology (ABOG) certifying examination in the subspecialties are considered one of the most stressful professional accomplishments in a young physician's life.

- Formal and informal discussions among Society for Gynecologic Oncology (SGO) membership identified that certifying exam processes are not well understood leading to angst among candidates.
- Between 2013-2022 historical pass rates were 87% (n=537) leading several candidates to retake boards.
- Most candidate members expressed a desire for a formal reliable source of information for this exam.
- Due to the timing of the SGO Annual Meeting relative to board exams there have been informal support sessions for some, but not all, candidate members creating inequity among membership and need for unverified private vendors in this space.

Objectives

To support its junior members preparing for their certifying exam, a group of Board-Certified Gynecologic Oncologists within the SGO sought to form a Taskforce for Board Certification Support.

This taskforce had the following objectives:

- Create a forum to partner with ABOG for candidates to review certifying exam delivery, assessment processes, and scoring.
- Provide an ongoing venue for certifying candidates to get reliable education increasing equity among our membership.
- Assist candidates in identifying content that is addressed on the certifying exam via hypothetical cases and case reviews to improve board pass rates.

Methods

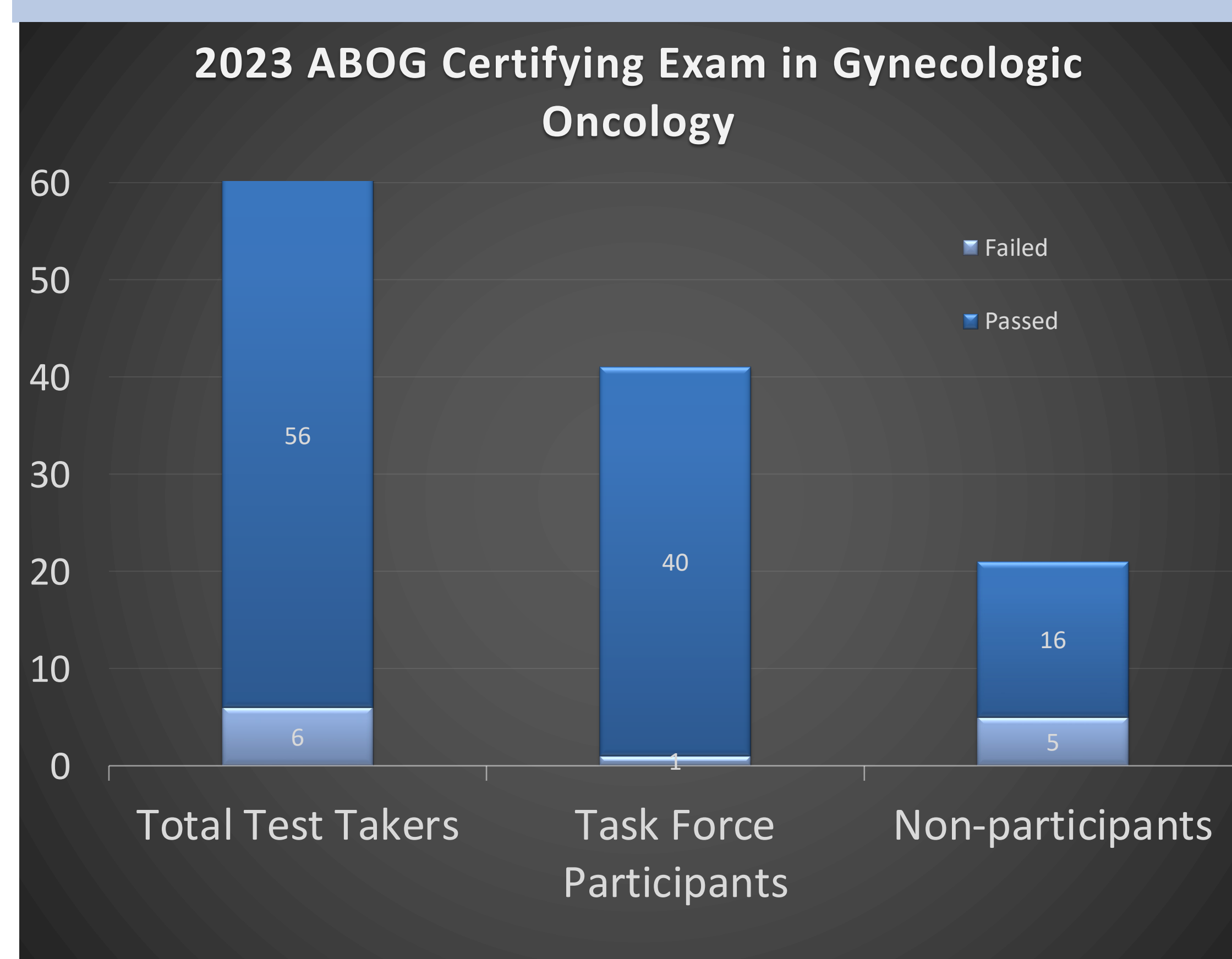
A taskforce within the SGO Education Committee formed, sought out partnership with ABOG, submitted a proposal for events at the SGO annual meeting, and created enduring content.

- After the exam, pass rates were compared between test takers who utilized the sessions compared to those that did not.
- Qualitative data was also obtained from participants.

Results

- ABOG partnership resulted in board member attendance to the SGO annual meeting that included a special session as well as a questions & answers session with candidates.
- At the annual meeting, the taskforce developed three small group sessions that simulated the oral exam process.

Results



A total of 62 candidates took the ABOG gynecologic oncology certifying exam with 56 passing (90% pass rate). Forty-one of these candidates participated in the SGO taskforce sessions, with a **97.6% pass rate (n=40)**. For the 21 candidates who did not participate, 16 passed (76.1% pass rate). When comparing cohorts, the candidates who participated in these sessions had a **significantly higher pass rate (p=0.007)**. When comparing to the historical cohort, the candidates again had a **significantly higher pass rate (p=0.046)**.

Qualitative survey data overwhelmingly confirmed candidates found the taskforce supported their efforts in obtaining board certification.

Sample Comments include:

- These sessions were fantastic. They need to be a permanent fixture!
- Confidence builder to hear the type of questions to be asked, hear tips on how to answer, hear others formulate answers.
- Incredible experience! I am grateful for all those who volunteered to make this possible.
- Sample cases gave an idea of hypothetical situations posed during the exam with multiple levels of questions for each scenario
- I think it was really helpful to have the mock cases of the day and the mock case list. I thought being asked questions in a mock oral format was very helpful and especially to do it with my peers who were also actively preparing for the exam. The feedback from the moderators was also extremely helpful. The timing - being about 4 weeks prior to boards - I think was great because we all had our foundation studying completed but this really allowed me to think about how to focus the final prep for the boards. Highly highly recommend it to future people preparing for the boards.
- This was an incredibly valuable experience and I hope this activity continues years to come! Thank you all for your hard work to prepare these discussions. It was clear a lot of time and effort was put forth to ensure this was a beneficial experience.
- The round tables were great - I think more time should be given to stats in the future and this should be separate from courses directed toward fellows
- I found that the structured cases and mocks were helpful for knowing what to expect from the exam, but I think it was most helpful when we got substantive feedback about big learning points for each topic
- These roundtable discussions allowed us to identify areas of strength and weakness prior to the exam. It allowed us to go back and prep for that area. Also, it is invaluable to hear how other candidates answer questions and compare how we would have. To be able to talk aloud is needed for this type of exam. I believe these roundtable discussions are a must for any candidate preparing for the exam.
- Confidence-building. I had been too busy at work to stick to my study plan, and was considering withdrawing until next year, but after the roundtables, I saw that my study plan was too in-depth and I knew enough to push through the rest of the material to take the exam as scheduled.
- Having the opportunity to answer verbally board style questions (and listen to others be asked questions) to help gauge my preparation for the boards and then be able to think about how to focus my studying over the following weeks before the exam took place.
- Rotating moderators was great. It was very helpful to hear how other candidates were answering questions

Results

Six podcasts were produced as enduring educational materials. Each were uploaded and available on all major podcast platforms and the SGO education website. From the major podcast platforms these amassed over 3,300 downloads on the following topics:

- Case list creation
- Radiation oncology
- ICU & Perioperative considerations
- Ovarian, peritoneal, fallopian tube cancer
- Uterine malignancies: endometrial cancer, sarcoma, & gestational trophoblastic disease
- Cervical, vulvar, & vaginal cancer

Conclusions

The development of materials, partnership with ABOG, and facilitation of live sessions to assist candidates in passing the certifying examination by the SGO taskforce was successful in producing higher board pass rates.

Future Directions

- A proposal for events at the 2024 SGO Annual Meeting has been composed
- The taskforce has secured ongoing ABOG partnership to continuing this project on an annual basis
- ABOG is looking to take the success seen to other sub-specialty groups including maternal fetal medicine, reproductive endocrinology and infertility, female pelvic medicine and reconstruction surgery, minimally invasive gynecologic surgery
- A submission to the Association of Professors of Gynecology and Obstetrics/ Council on Resident Education in Obstetrics and Gynecology Annual Meeting has been submitted
- Based on feedback provided after last year we plan to expand the session to also include information on the qualifying exam to reach a broader audience to include residents and fellows
- Further topics for enduring materials have been identified