



Center for Medicaid and State Operations/Survey and Certification Group

Ref: S&C-03-28

DATE: July 10, 2003

FROM: Director
Survey and Certification Group

SUBJECT: Automation of Surveyor Minimum Qualifications Test (SMQT) and Clarification of Survey Activities

TO: Survey and Certification Regional Office Management (G-5)
State Survey Agency Directors

The purpose of this memorandum is to inform Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) Regional Offices (ROs) and State Survey Agency personnel that the SMQT has been converted from a paper and pencil test to an automated test that will be administered at Pearson VUE's testing centers located across the United States, including Alaska, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico. Surveyors will travel to one of over 200 testing centers (usually located within an hour of their home/workplace), and take the test at a computer station at one of Pearson VUE's testing centers. Also, the references to Module B in the State Operations Manual (SOM), Section 4009.1 and Appendix P, p-29 are no longer applicable.

Automation

Test Administration

The test administration features will stay the same. Since the SMQT is an open book test, surveyors will still be able to use the State Operations Manual (SOM), Appendices P, PP, and R that they receive at Long Term Care Basic Health Facility Surveyor Training (Basic). Surveyors must bring their own copies of these appendices to the test. Before April 2002, surveyors were provided with a clean copy of the appendices to use during testing, but since April, surveyors have been allowed to bring their own copies of these appendices. The appendices can contain marginal notes, underlinings, and tabs.

A white board and marker (to be used as scratch paper) and a calculator will be provided by the testing center for use during the test. Surveyors will be given the same amount of time (four hours) to complete the test, with breaks taken as needed. Surveyors can still go back to questions to change their answers and/or mark questions to be reviewed again before submitting their tests. A process for marking questions is built into the automated test.

Eligibility

States will work with surveyors to determine surveyor eligibility to take the SMQT. Surveyors must attend Basic for the full class and receive a certificate before taking the test. If a surveyor does not complete the full training, States must inform Performance-Based Selection (PBS), the contractor currently responsible for overseeing the administration of the SMQT, and the RO immediately, and the surveyor will be taken off of the eligible list.

Registration

The process for registration has changed. With the new automated system, States will work with surveyors to determine eligibility, when, and where they will take the test. States will fill out the revised SMQT State Candidates Roster Sheet completely and list 3 possible dates and times for each surveyor to take the test. (A copy of the revised roster will be provided to ROs and States before automated testing begins. A list of all testing centers has been provided to States.) States will be responsible for forwarding the roster sheet via email (preferred), fax, or mail to PBS. At the same time, States must send a copy of the roster to the RO. PBS will notify Pearson VUE that the surveyors listed on the roster sheet are eligible to take the SMQT. Once PBS has notified Pearson VUE, PBS will inform the person designated to register surveyors in each State. The State designee will then be responsible for calling Pearson VUE and scheduling the actual testing session for surveyors in their States. Pearson VUE and the State designee will then notify the surveyors of the date, time, and location of their tests. To ensure that surveyors can be scheduled to take the SMQT as soon as possible after taking Basic, they should be registered at least a month in advance.

Testing is available Monday through Friday at larger testing centers and two or three days a week at smaller testing centers that are not used a lot. If a surveyor is geographically located closer to another State or testing center, the surveyor can be registered to take the test in that location. (Surveyors do not need to take the SMQT in their own States.)

Security

The test administrator will sign surveyors in when they arrive at the testing center. The surveyor will be required to provide two forms of identification, one a photo ID, be photographed and fingerprinted (with a scanner, not with ink). The test administrator will look through the appendices to make sure there are no loose or extra papers in them, and ask surveyors if any test-specific information is written in the appendices. We are depending on the integrity of the surveyors. In addition, surveyors will be asked to read and agree to comply with all security procedures.

Before the surveyor enters the testing room, he/she will place all personal items, including sweaters, jackets, purses and watches, into a locker. Only the surveyor will have the key to the locker. Nothing except the key, a photo ID, and the appendices will be allowed in the testing room. Any other materials required will be provided by the testing center.

Special Accommodations

We will continue to make special accommodations to individuals with special needs as appropriate. The surveyor must provide documentation that satisfies the State and RO that special accommodations are needed.

The Automated Test

The automated SMQT is simple, clear, and user-friendly. At least one proctor will be present at all times to answer any questions about the automated process. The proctor is an employee of the testing center and cannot answer questions about the subject material.

Cancellations

If cancellation is necessary, the surveyor or the State representative must call Pearson VUE more than 24 hours before the scheduled test. If a test is cancelled less than 24 hours in advance, CMS will be charged. The surveyor must notify the State, PBS, and the RO of all cancellations immediately.

Test Results

Test results will be sent to States from PBS within one week of testing. The person that each State designated to receive results will now be notified of their surveyor's test results in a protected email rather than through Federal Express. Results must be kept strictly confidential by the person designated to receive them at the State level. The person designated to receive results of surveyors or their supervisors will notify them of their results. ROs will continue to receive summary results once a month.

Survey Activities

The references to Module B in the SOM Section 4009.1 and Appendix P, p-29 are no longer applicable. Module A (the non-clinical part) and Module B (the clinical part) have been converted from two four-hour tests administered over two consecutive days to a one-day four hour test. If field test questions are added, an extra half hour is allowed. The current SMQT contains field test questions until further notice. All surveyors who conduct long term care surveys must complete and pass the test in order to survey independently. (See S&C-03-06)

Any updates or changes to SMQT procedures and policies will be conveyed to the ROs, and they will be responsible for sharing the information with States. States will be responsible for sharing applicable information with surveyors.

Effective Date

Immediately.

Training

This information should be shared with all survey and certification staff, surveyors, their managers, and the State/regional training coordinators.

/s/
Steven A. Pelovitz