

## NPLEX Elective Pharmacology Examination: (EPE)

The 75-item EPE is a separate (elective) examination, and is far more comprehensive than the 40 items that are included on the NPLEX Part II – Core Clinical Science Examination (CCSE). Because the CCSE is required by all states, many of whom have little or no prescriptive authority in the naturopathic scope, the emphasis on the CCSE is on drugs that have been prescribed by another practitioner. The emphasis on the EPE assumes that there *is* broad prescriptive authority for NDs in the jurisdiction.

For the 40 pharmacology items on the NPLEX CCSE (which are part of the **case-based** examination):

- Focus is on indications, contraindications, interactions, and adverse reactions (particularly **reactions or deficiencies that can be addressed *without* taking the patient off the drug**).  
[NOTE: If an ND cannot prescribe a drug, s-he cannot take a patient off the drug.]
- Items are worded with an orientation toward **drugs** that have been **prescribed by another practitioner**, assessing what an entry-level ND needs to know about those drugs to safely treat that patient (e.g, interactions with therapies s-he might prescribe as an ND).
- The CCSE drug list (approximately 200 drugs) has been designed to address every system and every condition on the NPLEX conditions list, as well as to provide examples of drugs with every major mechanism of action.
- The CCSE drug list contains over-the-counter (OTC) medications.
- Some items test whether an entry-level ND knows when referral to a specialist is appropriate (i.e., recognizing the level of pathology of the patient).

For the 75-item EPE:

- Focus is on primary effects, adverse effects, pharmacokinetics/pharmacodynamics, mechanisms of action, monitoring, and knowledge the class of drugs to which a particular drug belongs.  
[NOTE: To be able to take a patient off a drug, the ND must be able to prescribe that drug, and must have greater knowledge of the drug than if s-he was treating a patient who is on the drug as prescribed by another practitioner.]
- The drug list has been carefully designed, based on two criteria:
  1. The drugs that are most commonly prescribed by family practice healthcare providers (including NDs); and
  2. Examples of drugs from every major category (e.g., ACE inhibitors), to ensure that examinees understand the functions of the different drug classifications.  
[NOTE: It is more important that the examinee know how a class of drugs works than to know all the specifics of the most recent iteration of that type of drug.]
- The EPE drug list (approximately 250 drugs) contains prescription drugs only (i.e., there are no OTC drugs on the list).
- Items are worded with an orientation toward drugs for which an ND might want to find an alternative (naturopathic) treatment **or which an ND might typically prescribe**.

The EPE has been developed in accordance with accepted psychometric standards and principles: From practice analysis, to blueprint development, to training of item writers and getting items written, to multiple reviews of items by subject matter experts, to standard setting via the Angoff method, to post-test psychometric analysis. Regulatory authorities decide if they want to require that new licensees pass the EPE to be eligible for licensure. This requirement may be implemented at any time.

NABNE has encouraged new graduates to take the examination, even if they will be practicing in jurisdictions that do not (yet) require it. If an examinee is already studying to be able to answer the pharmacology items on the CCSE, s-he may as well go the extra step to study the deeper concepts that will be tested on the elective pharmacology examination. If at some point the ND wishes to move to a jurisdiction that *does* require the EPE, s-he will not have to wait for the next administration of the examination before being able to begin practice in the new jurisdiction. Also, it would be to the candidate's advantage to take the EPE at the same time as the NPLEX CCSE, to avoid the necessity of paying the application/proctoring fee a second time. Between 60% and 70% of examinees who take the CCSE also take the EPE, even though only three (soon to be four) jurisdictions actually *require* it.