

Dermatopathology Examination in Europe: A Summary of 6 Years of the European Board Certification

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On December 6, 2008, the sixth examination in Dermatopathology organized by the International Committee for Dermatopathology (ICDP) in conjunction with the Union Européenne des Médecins Spécialistes (UEMS)—sections Dermatology and Pathology, was held in Frankfurt, Germany. The examination has been organized yearly since 2003 and is sponsored by the International Society of Dermatopathology, the European Society for Dermatopathology, and the Ibero-Latin American Society of Dermatopathology. The examination is open to dermatopathologists (either dermatologists or pathologists) on a worldwide basis. Starting in 2007, it was decided, however, that candidates coming from countries outside Europe, where a Board Certification for Dermatopathology is already in place, should have passed the Board Examination in Dermatopathology of their country in order to take the examination organized by the ICDP–UEMS. Details on examination guidelines, eligibility criteria, members of the examination committee, and examples from past examinations and application forms are posted on the Web site of the ICDP at www.icdermpath.org.

The examination is structured in 3 main parts. The first part consists of 60 written questions; the second part includes 40 pictures (immunofluorescence, immunohistology, or clinical pictures), which are projected on a screen. In the last part, 70 histopathologic sections of inflammatory and neoplastic

skin conditions are reviewed at the microscope (microscopes are provided kindly by the Department of Pathology of the University of Frankfurt).

During the last 6 years, a total of 170 candidates from 39 different countries have come to Frankfurt (Germany) to participate in this examination (Tables 1, 2). One hundred of them were board-certified dermatologists, 66 were pathologists, and 4 had dual certification in both dermatology and pathology. Europe has been the most represented continent with 99 candidates (not surprisingly, being this primarily a European examination), but physicians from 5 different continents came to Frankfurt to take the examination. Sixty-two candidates (36.5%) failed to pass 1, 2, or all 3 parts on their first attempt. Fourteen of the candidates who failed the examination were from the United States and were not certified by the American Board of Dermatopathology (this happened in the years when it was allowed for these candidates to sit in the European examination). Many of these candidates saw the European Board as an alternative to the American examination (according to people who took both examinations, the degree of difficulty is comparable, but eligibility criteria are different, as training in a certified center is not yet required for the European examination; thus, some candidates who may not have been eligible for the American Board in Dermatopathology were able to take the European examination. This peculiar situation was recognized and, as already mentioned, eligibility criteria for non-European candidates were changed). The percentage of failures without counting candidates coming from the United States is lower (48 of 145 or 33.1%).

The need for a formal examination in Dermatopathology in Europe (or, more generally, outside the United States) was felt already for a long time. In the United States, the Board of Dermatopathology was initiated in 1973 with the participation of both dermatologists and pathologists. The introduction of the examination raised dramatically the standards of Dermatopathology in that country. In Europe and in other countries of the world, on the other hand, the practice of Dermatopathology was (and still is) very variegated, depending on the country and sometimes even the city or the single institution. In fact, in some countries like Germany, both dermatologists and pathologists regularly evaluate skin biopsies in both academic and nonacademic centers; in other countries, like Italy or Spain, for example, only pathologists are allowed to practice

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TABLE 1. Candidates Stratified According to the Country of Origin

Country	No. Candidates (Dermatologists/Pathologists)
Australia	2 (0/2)
Austria	8 (8/0)
Belgium	8 (5/4)*
Brasil	2 (1/1)
Bulgaria	1 (1/0)
Canada	1 (0/1)
Czech Republic	1 (1/0)
Egypt	1 (1/0)
Ethiopia	1 (1/0)
France	4 (2/2)
Germany	22 (22/1)*
Hungary	4 (2/4)†
India	1 (0/1)
Indonesia	1 (1/0)
Iran	5 (1/4)
Israel	2 (0/2)
Italy	6 (5/1)
Japan	2 (1/1)
Jordan	2 (2/0)
Lebanon	3 (2/1)
Mexico	1 (1/0)
The Netherlands	2 (0/2)
New Zealand	1 (1/0)
Pakistan	1 (1/0)
Philippines	2 (2/0)
Portugal	1 (1/0)
Romania	2 (1/1)
Saudi Arabia	5 (2/3)
Singapore	2 (1/1)
Slovenia	2 (2/0)
South Korea	5 (5/0)
Spain	12 (11/1)
Sweden	2 (0/2)
Switzerland	13 (10/3)
Taiwan	4 (4/0)
Thailand	2 (2/0)
Turkey	1 (1/0)
United Kingdom	10 (2/8)
United States	25 (1/24)
Total	170 (104/70)†

*One candidate both Dermatologist and Pathologist.

†Two candidates both Dermatologist and Pathologist.

dermatopathology for the most part, but many dermatologists are able to practice dermatopathology in academic settings. In Germany, Austria, France, and Switzerland, recent regulations allow dermatologists to report on histopathologic skin specimens. Still in other countries, only pathologists are allowed officially, which probably explains the high number of dermatologists coming to Frankfurt to get an official recognition for their dermatopathology skills (although such an examination does not bear any influence on national

TABLE 2. Candidates Stratified According to Geographical Regions

Region	No. Candidates (Dermatologists/Pathologists)
Europe*†	99 (74/29)
North America	27 (2/25)
Far East	20 (17/3)
Middle East	18 (8/10)
Australia/New Zealand	3 (1/2)
South America	2 (1/1)
Africa	1 (1/0)

*Including Turkey.

†Four candidates both Dermatologist and Pathologist.

regulations). In short, in Europe, there are no regulations valid for the entire continent; at the same time, and much more important, there is no *standard* for Dermatopathology (neither for the continent nor for any specific country in it).

Finally, 2 of the following important aspects should be especially underlined:

1. Among those doing Dermatopathology in Europe, no dermatologists are required to get special training in general pathology, nor are pathologists required to get special training in clinical dermatology.
2. The training programs in Dermatopathology (both of dermatological and pathological societies) are, at the least, chaotic. There is no uniformity in training programs, and training centers are not identified.

The first Dermatopathology Examination in Frankfurt in 2003 was a milestone in the history of Dermatopathology in Europe and, indeed, worldwide. For the first time in the “old continent,” there has been an attempt to rise the standards of Dermatopathology with verification of individual knowledge on the basis of a formal examination. In addition, for the first time, such an examination was not limited to members of a specific medical society and/or a given country but was open to every dermatologist and pathologist worldwide (with the provision that specific requirements concerning training in dermatopathology were fulfilled). In other words, not only did the examination aim at rising the standards in Dermatopathology but also did it without boundaries, thus being one of the first attempts at “international certification” in the history of medicine.

The ICDP/UEMS Examination Committee developed criteria for a curriculum in dermatopathology, thus proposing guidelines to harmonize this discipline in different countries based not on national rules but rather on internationally recognized standards. In addition, starting with 2009, training centers will be identified in Europe and, subsequently, worldwide. The identification of training centers is a further development in the process toward a better dermatopathology in Europe, similarly to what is happening in the United States. For the moment, special training in a certified center is especially recommended, but it is not mandatory in order to be eligible to take the examination. Moreover, we would like to

underline that passing the European Dermatopathology Examination does not imply the possibility to perform dermatopathology in the country of origin, as national regulations are independent of this examination. On the other hand, Switzerland adopted the ICDP/UEMS Dermatopathology Examination as the official examination for the subspecialty “Dermatopathology,” thus granting it an official status in terms of certification as well.

The future of Dermatopathology is intrinsically bound to the experience, qualifications, and knowledge of those doing it and on the passion and commitment of those caring for it. The examination organized by the ICDP/UEMS

paved the way for a future of high standards in this discipline also outside the United States, allowing verification and certification of specific expertise. We strongly believe that Dermatology, Dermatopathology, and Pathology will all profit from it, on both an academic and a practical level, and we are looking forward to a proficient and harmonious collaboration between dermatologists and pathologists. Much more important, we are profoundly convinced that those who will profit most from it will be our patients, who will benefit from higher standards in a crucial diagnostic field: this is, in the end, the goal of all our efforts and the only thing that counts in medicine.