Until 2004, the Arizona State Board of Physical Therapy maintained an active role in exam failure remediation for applicants who failed the National Physical Therapy Examination (NPTE) two or more times, pursuant to the following statute:

A.R.S. §32-2024 (D) “Before the board may approve an applicant for subsequent testing beyond two attempts, an applicant shall reapply for licensure or certification and shall demonstrate evidence satisfactory to the board of having successfully completed additional clinical training or coursework, or both, as determined by the board.”

Applicants would submit a written plan of study to the board for review and approval at a public meeting, thereby placing the board in the role of mediating appropriate study to facilitate the applicant’s successful passage of the NPTE. During sunset review discussions in August 2003, the board identified several considerations concerning this role:

1. The recently published 3rd edition of the Model Practice Act (MPA) did not include board approval of remediation plans following unsuccessful NPTE attempts;
2. Few states had statutes that mandated board approval of remediation plans following multiple NPTE failures;
3. The board questioned whether playing a role in facilitating NPTE passage was consistent with the board’s primary mission of public protection; and
4. The board questioned their responsibility for approval of a candidate’s remediation plan.

Chief among the board’s concerns was their lack of

The board questioned whether playing a role in facilitating NPTE passage was consistent with the board’s primary mission of public protection; and the board questioned their responsibility for approval of a candidate’s remediation plan.

Peg Hiller, PT, received her bachelor’s degree and certificate in physical therapy from the University of Michigan in 1972. In 1974 she moved to Arizona and began her 30-year career in clinical practice and Association leadership. She has worked in a variety of in-patient and outpatient settings developing her skills in manual physical therapy practice. For the past four years Peg has worked as the investigator and compliance officer for the Arizona State Board of Physical Therapy. In addition to her roles in complaint investigations and compliance monitoring, Peg has developed educational programs for students and physical therapy practitioners about lawful practice in Arizona. She has served on the FSBPT’s 2002 Membership Survey Task Force, and last year authored an article for the Federation Forum about collaboration between regulatory boards and professional associations.

Peg has served in a variety of APTA and Arizona Chapter leadership positions since 1976, culminating in her term as Arizona Chapter President in 1998-1999. She has served on the APTA Committee on Chapters, and was appointed to the APTA Vision 2020 Task Force and the APTA Direct Access Task Force. Peg currently is a member of the APTA Ethics and Judicial Committee and chairs the FSBPT Ethics and Legislation Committee.
NPTE Remediation: the Arizona Experience
Peggy Hiller, PT, Arizona PT Board

expertise in determining the basis for an applicant’s NPTE failure. This requires individual candidate assessment to distinguish between issues of test anxiety, undiagnosed learning disabilities, knowledge deficiencies, or other factors that might affect examination outcome. Of equal concern was the board’s lack of proficiency in determining appropriate and effective remediation strategies. The board struggled with possible liability if they approved a remediation plan and the candidate was unsuccessful in their subsequent attempt, and they felt unprepared to assess the availability and quality of remediation resources. Ultimately the board questioned the justification of including exam failure remediation as one of their regulatory responsibilities.

Two examples highlight the board’s discomfort in approving plans for NPTE remediation:

- A physical therapist assistant (PTA) applicant came before the board following multiple failed NPTE attempts. The candidate was born in the United States but her family moved to India when she was age three, returning to the U.S. when she was age six. The applicant was subsequently placed in ‘unable to read’ classes through the 7th grade. Following her failed attempts at the NPTE she worked with the program director of a local PTA program, who identified that the applicant had problems with English comprehension, vocabulary, phonics, and medical terminology. How would the board have known that these were the factors needing remediation?

- A physical therapist (PT) applicant had seven failed attempts to pass the NPTE despite remediation efforts. The applicant graduated from an entry-level PT program in 1995 and the most recent attempt occurred in 2004, a gap of almost ten years. How would the board determine effective remediation strategies in light of the multiple factors intervening between the first and last attempt?

The outcome of the board’s discussion was their request to the legislature to remove language under §32-2024 (D) requiring board approval of a candidate’s remediation plan following two exam failures, which was effected through statutory change in 2004. There is currently no board involvement in exam failure remediation and no limit imposed by statute for the number of examination attempts.

How would the board determine effective remediation strategies in light of the multiple factors intervening between the first and last attempt?
NPTE Failure Remediation – The Ohio Story
Jeff Rosa, Ohio PT, AT & OT Board

Is assisting an applicant in passing the NPTE an appropriate role for a state board? In Ohio, for at least the past five years, that answer has been, “yes.” Unlike other states which have statutory limitations on the number of times an applicant can sit for the exam, Ohio has a rule that requires failing applicants to complete a board-approved remediation process.

According to rule 4755-23-03 (C) of the Ohio Administrative Code, “an applicant who fails the NPTE three or more times shall be required to satisfactorily complete various educational activities and/or a remedial education program approved by the section as part of the application process to retake the NPTE.”

Individuals falling under the requirements of this provision work with the members of the Board who serve as the Education Oversight Liaisons. These board members have typically been university-based members who have experience working with students. To ensure that applicants are aware of potential requirements before submitting a re-examination application, the education oversight requirements were placed on the Board’s website.

After three failures, an applicant is required to complete an exam prep questionnaire, which includes information about materials the applicant used to prepare for the NPTE, asks if the applicant requested the FSPBT performance feedback, and any review courses taken. Based on the information supplied by the applicant, the board staff sends a list of examination preparation recommendations to the applicant.

After four failures, the board requires an educational study plan. The study plan forms the basis of the interaction between the applicant and the Education Oversight Liaison. The study plan must include the weak areas that were identified on the performance feedback, a plan of study and study schedule, a tutoring plan, and completion of the PEAT or other NPTE practice exam.

If the applicant fails again, the board enters into a limited license agreement with the applicant before approving the individual to sit for the NPTE. As part of this agreement, the applicant is required to complete a period of clinical supervised practice upon successful completion of the remediation process.
passage of the NPTE.

As one might imagine, this remediation activity is often extremely time consuming for the board members serving as Education Oversight Liaisons. In addition, applicants who continue to fail the exam often expect the board to continue to help them pass the test. As a result, the Board reviewed rules in other states to serve as a basis for change.

The Board originally proposed amending rule 4755-23-03 (C) to require the plan be developed with assistance of faculty from the applicant’s entry-level physical therapy program and applicant’s who failed the exam nine or more times would be required to repeat an accredited entry-level PT or PTA program.

When the Board initially published the initial draft for comment, many educators expressed concern and opposition to the requirement that they assist the applicant in the development of the remediation plan. Based on these comments and after a board discussion on the role of the NPTE as the arbiter of entry-level competence, the Board ultimately decided to follow the lead of Arizona and no longer have any requirements for exam failure candidates. The Board felt that, even after three years of attempts, if an applicant passed the NPTE, they still are demonstrating current entry-level competence based on the current exam blueprint. The Board’s update rule is scheduled to go into effect on May 1, 2009.
NPTE Remediation in North Dakota
Thomas Mohr, PT, PhD, North Dakota Board

The North Dakota Practice Act states that “an applicant for licensure who does not pass the examination on the first attempt may retake the examination one additional time without re-application for licensure within six months of the first failure. Before the board approves an applicant for subsequent testing beyond two attempts, an applicant shall re-apply for licensure and shall submit evidence satisfactory to the board of having successfully completed additional clinical training or coursework, or both, as the board determines.”

The North Dakota rules and regulations require that “after the second failed attempt, an applicant must re-apply for licensure, complete a remediation plan approved by the board, and wait at least 60 days before repeating the examination.”

The North Dakota Board of PT Policies require the candidate to develop and complete a formal plan of remediation before being granted approval to sit for the NPTE after the second failure. The candidate must work with the North Dakota Board of PT to develop a plan that will address areas that may need additional study. The first step in the remediation plan should be for the candidate to contact the director of the physical therapy education program where they received their degree.

The actual remediation process requires the candidate to develop a remediation plan with the help of the program director, and submit that plan to the North Dakota Board of PT for approval. After a candidate has failed the NPTE two times, he must wait at least 60 days before reapplying to the North Dakota Board of PT and the FSBPT to retake the exam for the third time. During this waiting period he must complete the remediation plan approved by the North Dakota Board of PT. The candidate is encouraged to get a performance feedback report from the FSBPT. It gives a breakdown of scores in each area of the NTPE which helps identify problem areas and also is helpful in developing a remediation plan.

A PT board member is assigned to work with the candidate to oversee the remediation plan process. When the candidate finishes the remediation program, he must have documentation of completion of the program, which is submitted to the board member assigned to him. That board member then notifies the ND PT Board administrator that the plan has been successfully completed and the administrator clears the candidate to sit for the NPTE.

The remediation program at the University of North Dakota, for graduates who have failed the NPTE twice, includes having the candidate return to the university for three to five days of intense review. The PT Department faculty provides a battery of old examinations that were given in the curriculum when the candidate was a student. The candidate reviews the old exams on site so that he has the benefit of the department faculty, medical library and other information or equipment that might be beneficial for the review. The purpose of going through the old exams is not to see if the candidate can answer the items correctly as much as it is to give the candidate an idea of where his areas of weakness are, and then use that information to review materials related directly to the areas of weakness.

In addition, the candidate is encouraged to purchase the online Practice Exam and Assessment Tool (PEAT). The program director schedules a session with the candidate, using the live PEAT examination where the director and candidate go through 25 to 50 items from the PEAT. The purpose of review using the PEAT is to help the candidate with test-taking strategies, particularly with reading the question, identifying key words, deciding what the item is actually asking, and formulating an answer prior to looking at the four possible responses. We have found that many students who fail the exam actually have a good working knowledge of course content and possess good clinical skills, but they are not particularly good test takers, especially with multiple choice exams that are as well written as those on the NPTE.

So far, this process has worked very well for the board and the candidates. Granted, we are a small state with only two PT education programs and one PTA program. All of the PT and PTA program directors are willing to help out. Our position would be that the educational program carries some responsibility to graduates to help them with remediation and passing of the NPTE. Obviously, the majority of the burden lies with the candidate to adequately prepare. In our case that would mean that the candidate develops and completes a remediation plan that is satisfactory to the North Dakota Board of PT and that ultimately leads to success on passing the NPTE.

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Tom Mohr, PT, PhD is currently the Chairman of the Physical Therapy Department at the University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Sciences. Tom is also a current member of the North Dakota State Examining Committee for Physical Therapists. Tom has been involved with the Federation since 1990 and has served as an item writer for the NPTE and has chaired the Examination Construction and Review Committee, Examination Program Oversight Committee, FCCPT Board of Directors and the Uniform Pathway Task Force. Tom has also served on a number of other committees and task forces for the Federation.

Tom received the President’s Award in 1999 and the Outstanding Service Award in 2001. Tom is an active member of the North Dakota Physical Therapy Association and served on its Board of Directors from 1990 to 1992. He is also a member of the CAPTE Central Panel on physical therapy program accreditation.