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MEDICINE BOARD CONSIDERS SKILLS EXAM FOR NEW DOCTORS

Dr. James Thompson, president of the Federation of State Medical Boards, and Dr. Peter Scoles, a senior vice president of the National Board of Medical Examiners, appeared before the Massachusetts Board of Registration in Medicine today to outline a new examination designed to test the readiness of graduating medical students to treat patients. The new test would require medical students to participate in a series of simulations using actors mimicking patients with specific medical problems and conditions. According to Dr. Martin Crane, a gynecologist from the South Shore who chairs the Massachusetts Medical Board, the Board wanted to discuss the new exam format publicly and had invited Drs. Thompson and Scoles to brief the Board on the exam and implementation issues.

The clinical skills examination has been proposed by the Federation of State Medical Boards and the National Board of Medical Examiners, the two organizations that jointly develop the written examinations used in Massachusetts and throughout the country to license doctors. According to Drs. Thompson and Scoles, the exam has been developed to improve patient safety by testing fundamental clinical and communication skills before new doctors are granted medical licenses.

Drs. Thompson and Scoles stated the fee for the new test will be approximately \$1,000, and medical students will have to travel to regional examination sites to take the test. They told the Massachusetts Board that the new test will be launched nation-wide in 2005, and site selection for the regional testing centers is underway. Speaking for the Massachusetts Board, Dr. Crane urged that a regional testing center be located in Massachusetts in recognition of the large population of medical students in the state and

region, as well as the state's international leadership role in medical education and training.

Dr. Crane said that the Board would continue to work with the Federation of State Medical Boards and the National Board of Medical Examiners on the new examination and the potential siting of testing centers. The Board of Medicine sponsored the informational session in response to questions raised by Massachusetts medical students and the Massachusetts Medical Society. Dr. Crane noted, "The Board of Medicine is in a unique position to bring nationally-recognized experts to Massachusetts to help to facilitate meaningful discussion about patient safety and health care quality issues."

The Massachusetts Board of Registration in Medicine licenses more than 30,000 physicians, osteopaths and acupuncturists. The Board was created to protect the public health and safety by setting standards for the practice of medicine and ensuring that doctors who practice in the Commonwealth are appropriately qualified and competent. The Board investigates complaints, holds hearings, and determines sanctions. More information about the Board is available at www.massmedboard.org.