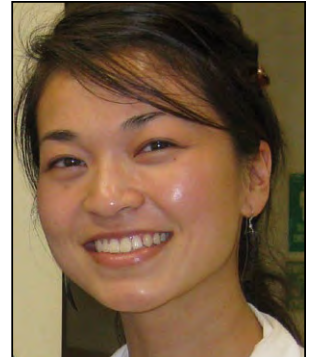


# Board Review Study Guides: A General Overview

Consuelo V. David, MD, MSc



No matter what year of residency you are in, there is no escaping the thought of the dermatology board certification examination, known simply as “the boards.” Multiple study tools exist to help residents memorize, recall, and summarize the mountains of information we learn in preparation for the boards; however, use of these tools requires an investment of time and sometimes money. Often, in-depth knowledge from 1 or 2 study materials is more helpful than shallow familiarity from every available resource. This article provides a general overview of the main board review study guides that currently are available to help residents decide which tools will give them the biggest bang for their investment (Table).

## Boards’ Fodder

*Pros*—Boards’ Fodder<sup>1</sup> is featured in *Directions in Residency*, a quarterly publication for residents from the American Academy of Dermatology, and offers thorough, well-organized reviews of key topics presented in table format. Boards’ Fodder is portable, making it useful while traveling or for supplemental quick review. My personal favorites are the reviews that include “Word Associations,” a tool that trains the mind to link 2 words or terms together, almost unconsciously. The majority of information is extracted from textbooks we already use and is prepared by fellow residents. The full Boards’ Fodder archive is now available in PDF format on the American Academy of Dermatology’s Web site (<http://www.aad.org>).

*Cons*—Boards’ Fodder offers high-yield, comprehensive content, which also makes it dense. Without a basic foundation of knowledge of a particular topic, this resource is more of an exercise in memorization than a review.

## Fast Facts for Board Review

*Pros*—Fast Facts for Board Review<sup>2</sup> is a new monthly feature available exclusively on the *Cutis* Web site

From Harbor-UCLA Medical Center, Torrance, California.  
The author reports no conflict of interest.

(<http://www.cutis.com>). It offers board-relevant, easy-to-review material on a range of commonly tested topics. This resource is similar to Boards’ Fodder in that it provides quick access to important facts in a table format; however, the content is less dense and therefore is easier to review. It is prepared by dermatologists who have already taken the boards rather than fellow residents. Another nice feature is that each fact sheet includes 5 practice questions with answers posted online.

*Cons*—Fast Facts for Board Review focuses on presenting key facts for selected topics and therefore is not comprehensive.

## Dermatology In-Review Online Practice Exam and Study System

*Pros*—Dermatology In-Review<sup>3</sup> consists of a text component, which is provided in the physical form of a binder with printed material, and a Web site that offers several tools for board review. The text is comprehensive and is written by experts in the field, but this resource is set apart from others by the tools offered on the Web site. Among them, perhaps the most helpful feature is the question bank of more than 1000 review questions and answers. The Web site also provides access to a PDF of the text, quizzes, and flashcards. Often, the flashcards are repetitive of the questions in the question bank, but it can still be helpful to have the same information presented in different ways. The Exam Cram Live webcast series contains live interviews, either through PowerPoint presentations or videos, with experts who discuss board-relevant topics and study tips. Some speakers are more captivating than others, but one can certainly glean board-relevant pearls from all of the presentations. The videos offer a nice change of pace from reading and memorization. Finally, Dermatology In-Review has an app with Kodachromes of clinical photographs and histopathologic images to use on the go.

*Cons*—Some residents have anecdotally expressed concern that although the Dermatology In-Review

## Board Review Study Guides

Resource	Price <sup>a</sup>	Available Online	Available for Kindle	Contains Practice Questions	Weight
Boards' Fodder <sup>1</sup>	Free on the American Academy of Dermatology Web site ( <a href="http://www.aad.org">http://www.aad.org</a> )	Yes	No	No	N/A
Fast Facts for Board Review <sup>2</sup>	Free on the <i>Cutis</i> Web site ( <a href="http://www.cutis.com">http://www.cutis.com</a> )	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Dermatology In-Review Online Practice Exam and Study System <sup>3</sup>	Free (registration required)	Yes	No	Yes	5.2 lb
<i>Dermatology: Quick Glance</i> <sup>4</sup>	\$57.93 (print, paperback); \$48.18 (Kindle Edition)	No	Yes	No	8.8 oz
<i>McGraw-Hill Specialty Board Review Dermatology: A Pictorial Review</i> <sup>5</sup>	\$74.40 (print, paperback); \$70.68 (Kindle Edition)	No	Yes	Yes	4.8 lb
<i>Dermatology: Illustrated Study Guide and Comprehensive Board Review</i> <sup>6</sup>	\$89.40 (print, paperback); \$49.99 (Kindle Edition)	No	Yes	No	2.3 lb
<i>Dermatology Secrets Plus</i> <sup>7</sup>	\$56.48 (print, paperback); \$34.99 (Kindle Edition)	No	Yes	Yes	2 lb

Abbreviation: N/A, not applicable.

<sup>a</sup>Prices per Amazon (<http://www.amazon.com>) and are subject to change.

text is a good place to start, it occasionally contains errors, presumably when information in the review book is compared to information in textbooks. Also, some of the photographs in the text and question bank are low resolution. The mobile app also has some functional problems and lacks a question bank feature. The text component is essentially a list of facts that can help residents recall information, but it provides minimal in-depth explanations. Without prior exposure to or study of dermatologic conditions, reading this text can be overwhelming. Keep in mind that the resource is industry sponsored and therefore may include conflicts of interest.

### Dermatology: Quick Glance

*Pros*—One of the biggest advantages of the *Dermatology: Quick Glance*<sup>4</sup> reference book is its portability, as it contains a huge amount of pertinent information in a pocket-sized package. The content primarily is presented in the form of tables, mnemonics, graphs, and lists, all of which are great for quick reference. When a question comes up, it only takes a few seconds to reach into your pocket, find the appropriate table, and learn a few new facts. This resource also includes a detailed dermatopharmacology chapter.

*Cons*—Because of its small size, this reference book inevitably is less comprehensive than its larger

counterparts. One of the biggest drawbacks is that the latest edition was published in 2004. It is likely that most of the information is still valid, but some sections require updates. Also, some of the tables contain format errors, making table columns misaligned. *Dermatology: Quick Glance* does not contain practice questions.

### **McGraw-Hill Specialty Board Review Dermatology: A Pictorial Review**

*Pros*—Reflective in its title, the main strength of the McGraw-Hill Specialty Board Review *Dermatology: A Pictorial Review*<sup>5</sup> reference book is its extensive collection of images, including photographs, diagrams, and drawings. Another advantage is the inclusion of practice questions and answers at the end of each chapter. The majority of the text is presented as bullet points; however, compared to other review materials that only list short words, phrases, and facts, the information in this book is fairly detailed. As a result, it reads similar to a textbook. The sections that review procedural dermatology largely present the material using photographs and tables. (On a personal note, one of my attending physicians said he used this book as his sole study source for the dermatology boards and felt he was sufficiently prepared.)

*Cons*—At the time this column was written, I read multiple reviews of the book online that noted factual and/or typographical errors, but it was only a small sample size of opinions, making it difficult to gauge the validity of the claims. An updated third edition is expected in May 2014, which may include corrections to any prior errors. Two drawbacks of this resource are the large size of the book and the cost.

### **Dermatology: Illustrated Study Guide and Comprehensive Board Review**

*Pros*—The *Dermatology: Illustrated Study Guide and Comprehensive Board Review*<sup>6</sup> book presents information using a combination of clear explanations listed as bullet points and in table format. Most of the teaching points are accompanied by high-quality images on nearly every page. There is even a section on medical coding. This book is small in size (2.3 lb) but manages to be a comprehensive resource.

*Cons*—There are no online accompaniments to the book. It also lacks practice questions; rather the author refers readers to the Dermatology In-Review question bank.

### **Dermatology Secrets Plus**

*Pros*—For those who enjoy practice questions, all of the content in the *Dermatology Secrets Plus*<sup>7</sup> reference book is presented in question-and-answer format. Depending

on how you learn, this format may encourage information retention and comprehension in a different way than the other materials reviewed here. The book is small in size and includes photographs, diagrams, and tables. There also is an interesting section on cultural dermatology.

*Cons*—The question-and-answer format of this book is not necessarily ideal; if you are similar to me and do not have much self-control, it is easy to immediately look at the answers listed directly underneath the questions.

### **Conclusion**

Although there is no substitute for foundational textbook reading, board review materials can be useful in helping residents pick out the salient points on important topics and recall commonly tested information. It is important to note that the discovery of errors in resource materials is a common concern among residents who are preparing for the boards; however, I do not think a truly error-free resource exists, not only because of poor editing and human error but also because the field of dermatology is constantly evolving and information sometimes can be controversial. Overall, the amount of accurate material provided in most resources will outweigh any erroneous information. Furthermore, there will always be information we have to find on our own, such as coding guidelines and literature updates. Hopefully this review has given you a sense of what each resource offers so you may choose the best one for yourself.

### **REFERENCES**

1. Boards' Fodder archives. American Academy of Dermatology Web site. <http://www.aad.org/members/publications/directions-in-residency/boards-fodder-archives>. Accessed September 4, 2013.
2. Fast Facts for Board Review. *Cutis* Web site. <http://www.cutis.com/articles/fast-facts-for-board-review.html>. Accessed September 4, 2013.
3. Hanke CW, ed. *The 2013/2014 Dermatology In-Review Study Guide: Companion to the Dermatology In-Review Online Study System*. USA: Educational Testing and Assessment Systems; 2013.
4. Jaffer SN, Queresh AA. *Dermatology: Quick Glance*. New York, NY: The McGraw-Hill Companies; 2004.
5. Ali A. *McGraw-Hill Specialty Board Review Dermatology: A Pictorial Review*. 2nd ed. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Professional; 2010.
6. Jain S. *Dermatology: Illustrated Study Guide and Comprehensive Board Review*. New York, NY: Springer; 2012.
7. Fitzpatrick JE, Morelli JG. *Dermatology Secrets Plus*. 4th ed. Philadelphia, PA: Mosby; 2010.