



September 2, 2014

**Re: COMLEX-USA Level 2-CE 2014-2015 Test Cycle:
Comprehensive Psychometric Review**

Dear NBOME Stakeholders,

Background

The NBOME COMLEX-USA examination series provides the pathway to licensure for osteopathic physicians in the United States. To meet this primary obligation, the NBOME sets a minimum pass score at each level of the series to qualify as meeting the competency for physician licensure.

In keeping with best practices in psychometrics and assessment, the COMLEX-USA Level 2-CE underwent standard setting in 2014. New criterion-referenced passing standards for COMLEX-USA Level 2-CE were approved by the NBOME Board of Directors in June 2014, and applied to the first 3,000 or so test-takers in the new test cycle that started in June 2014. This administration was the usually scheduled time and aligned with the standard academic calendar year as it has been in the past. The pass rate under the new standards appears similar (and so far is trending slightly higher) to that for the 2013-2014 test cycle. Since the initial 2014-2015 test cycle score reports were issued on August 14, 2014, the NBOME has received an extremely high level of inquiries from stakeholders regarding the scaling of the COMLEX-USA Level 2-CE three-digit scores and the published standard deviation for the new test cycle.

Issue under Review

Concerns were voiced from numerous stakeholder groups including deans, candidates, student organizations and others regarding the comparability of 2014-2015 COMLEX-USA Level 2-CE three-digit standard scores between the current and recent test cycles, which is an important issue for the secondary uses of COMLEX-USA scores, most notably in residency program applications. On August 21, 2014, the NBOME announced that a comprehensive psychometric review of 2014-2015 test cycle for COMLEX-USA Level 2-CE scores was underway, retracted the initial 3,000 score reports that had been issued, and promised further information to the public no later than September 2, 2014.

Process Findings

In a spirit of transparency and fairness and in recognition of the importance of secondary uses of score reports for residency program applications, student advancement, accreditation, and curricular evaluation and improvement, the NBOME conducted a comprehensive, internal, psychometric review as well as an external psychometric review with two independent psychometric experts, which resulted in the following findings:

1. The NBOME remains confident that the pass/fail determinations are accurate, reliable and fair. This serves the primary purpose of the examination – a measure of competency for licensure in osteopathic medicine –and is consistent with the NBOME mission to “protect the public by providing the means to assess competencies for osteopathic medicine and related health care professions.”
2. The mapping of the scores to a criterion-based passing standard of 400 provides comparability across years. A score of 400 will remain the pass/fail line for the COMLEX-USA Level 2-CE examination.
3. The NBOME has also historically mapped scores to a norm-based mean score of 500. Any normative meaning was likely to become obsolete with time, and, consequently to lead to the misinterpretation of test scores. The NBOME desired to address the impact of this mapping and its effect on the score interpretation.
4. The previous scaling resulted in a decreased standard deviation reported on the initial score release due to a norm-based mean of 500 and a criterion-based pass score of 400. Consequently, three-digit standard scores looked different as compared to those from previous years at equal percentiles.
5. The performance distribution was correct but the resulting three-digit score scale numbers did not accurately reflect comparability at equal percentiles of performance across test cycles. The NBOME is intent that the score scaling be as consistent and applicable as the pass/fail determination has proven to be.

Plan

Based on the comprehensive psychometric review, the NBOME will begin reissuing score reports for the 2014-2015 test cycle of the COMLEX-USA Level 2-CE examination on September 2, 2014. The scaling process will be modified to provide a scale where the mean is not fixed to a pre-specified value. This will provide better comparability from year-to-year across the score range. The new scale will maintain the criterion-based passing score of 400. All COMLEX-USA Level 2-CE Electronic Residency Application Service (ERAS) reports to residency program directors from August 14, 2014 have been retracted and new reports will be transmitted beginning September 2, 2014.

An extensive communication plan will continue to directly inform candidates, deans, program directors and key stakeholder groups including the American Osteopathic Association (AOA), American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (AACOM), Association of Osteopathic Directors and Medical Educators (AODME), Osteopathic Program Directors Association (OPDA), the Council of Osteopathic Student Government Presidents (COSGP), the Society of Osteopathic Medical Associations (SOMA), and others of the findings and the plan implementation. Postings will be included on the NBOME website.

The NBOME believes this plan, reviewed and endorsed by independent, external psychometric experts, to be effective, responsive and fair. It preserves the integrity and the primary purpose of the assessment – protecting the public – provides for

year-to-year comparability of three-digit standard scores, and meets a standard of fairness to the candidates for secondary uses of examination scores.

Sincerely,

Bruce P. Bates, DO
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