

COMLEX-USA FOR RESIDENCY PROGRAM DIRECTORS



COMLEX-USA

is the most appropriate assessment tool to measure competencies of osteopathic medical students and residents. The COMLEX-USA examination series is uniquely designed to assess competencies required to provide safe and effective osteopathic medical care to patients.

“

COMLEX and USMLE are both acceptable to the ACGME. The Single Accreditation System does nothing to alter that. We recognize the important role that COMLEX-USA plays in quality for osteopathic medical education and training.”

Thomas J. Nasca, MD, MACP

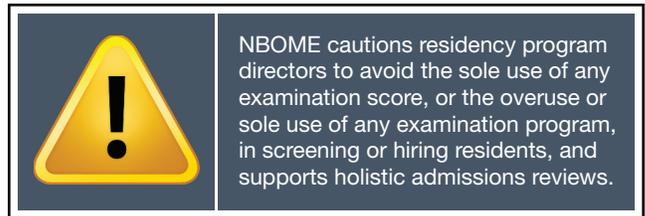
Chief Executive Officer, ACGME; Plenary presentation at the Annual AACOM Meeting, April 2015

PATHWAY TO LICENSURE

COMLEX-USA, the Comprehensive Osteopathic Medical Licensing Examination of the United States, is the examination series used by medical licensing authorities to make licensing decisions for osteopathic physicians. COMLEX-USA is accepted in all 50 United States and recognized by a number of international jurisdictions. This primary and intended use of COMLEX-USA supports the NBOME mission of protecting the public.

IMPORTANT SECONDARY USES

In addition to its primary use, COMLEX-USA scores are used for student promotion and graduation from a college of osteopathic medicine, and by residency program directors to screen and rank residency applicants, and in resident promotion and assessment. Although not designed for the primary purpose of selecting candidates for residency, COMLEX-USA and USMLE¹ scores are used increasingly to screen and evaluate DO residency applicants. To promote responsible use of COMLEX-USA scores in screening and evaluating DO residency applicants, the NBOME recommends residency and fellowship program directors understand COMLEX-USA examination scores—what the examinations measure, how standards are set, what the



scores mean, and studies correlating COMLEX-USA scores and performance in residency.

EVIDENCE FOR VALIDITY

A rigorous scientific process for test and case development and validation is used to produce examinations of the highest quality with evidence-based validity and reliability. Following a comprehensive review of COMLEX-USA and the USMLE (United States Medical Licensing Examination), the FSMB (Federation of State Medical Boards) endorsed both examinations as valid and reliable for their intended respective purposes, concluding the support for the validity of COMLEX-USA is exemplary.

RECOGNIZED BY THE ACGME

COMLEX-USA is recognized for acceptance into graduate medical education by the ACGME. The ACGME Single Accreditation System aligns accreditation standards for all residency programs in the U.S. by the year 2020, providing graduates of DO- and MD-granting medical schools the ability to complete residency and fellowship training in all programs. As such, there is mutual recognition and increased understanding for the important and unique qualifications and philosophies of both DO and MD graduates. The ACGME publically communicates its policy that COMLEX-USA and USMLE are both acceptable for ACGME residency programs and has clarified that DO candidates are not required to pass USMLE examinations in order to be eligible to apply to ACGME-accredited residency programs.² COMLEX-USA has been added to the

Common Program Requirements FAQs for Fellowship Program applications, and as an equivalent metric for medical knowledge in the Milestones requirements for numerous specialties.^{3,4}

Residency program directors rate COMLEX-USA as a top factor in selecting residency program applicants to interview and rank. A majority—77 percent of ACGME-accredited residency program directors—use COMLEX-USA as part of the application process for DO applicants.⁵

USED BY PROGRAM DIRECTORS

Many program directors embrace DOs with COMLEX-USA scores to include DO candidates in their applicant pool. Some specialties have a greater than 90 percent acceptance rate of DO applicants.

SCORING AND REPORTING

COMLEX-USA examinations use a criterion-referenced standard setting methodology. Standard 3-digit scores are reported and the passing score for COMLEX-USA Level 1 or Level 2-CE is 400, with the mean score between 500 and 550. Candidates who take COMLEX-USA who meet or exceed the standard passing score receive a pass. Passing means a candidate has met or exceeded the standard for competency.

PERCENTILE RANK SCORE CONVERTER

The NBOME website includes a score conversion tool for program directors to convert an applicant's 3-digit COMLEX-USA score to a percentile rank and compare an applicant's scores against those of his or her peers within a testing cycle.

COMLEX-USA Level 1, May 2016-April 2017 Cohort 3-DIGIT SCORE/PERCENTILE RANK

750	700	650	600	550	500	450	400
99	98	92	82	64	42	21	7

CONVERSION VARIES BY TESTING CYCLE

CHANGES TO ELIGIBILITY AND ATTESTATION BY PROGRAM DIRECTORS

There are new eligibility criteria for COMLEX-USA Level 3 examinations—residency program directors must attest to the fact that the licensure examination candidate is a resident in good academic and professional standing at the residency program and is approved to take the Level 3 examination. Good standing denotes that the resident meets the academic and professional requirements of the residency program and is eligible to continue as a resident in the program. The new criteria include a recommendation (not a requirement) that the Level 3 examination be taken after a minimum of six months in residency. The attestation process for COMLEX-USA Level 3 fulfills the NBOME mission to protect the public, adds value and entrustability to state licensing boards and patients, and further aligns COMLEX-USA to program directors and faculty with score reports and linkages for meeting milestone requirements.



In contrast to USMLE scores, which are difficult to interpret, and for which there is no published mean, COMLEX scores are easy to interpret. Additionally, the NBOME website provides a formula to convert COMLEX scores into a percentile."

Paul J. Schenarts, MD

Professor of Surgery and Program Director

Journal of Graduate Medical Education, June 2014

ENHANCING COMLEX-USA

In 2018-2019 COMLEX-USA is transitioning to a contemporary, two-decision point, competency-based examination blueprint and evidence-based design informed by extensive research on osteopathic physician practice, expert consensus and stakeholder surveys.⁶ The enhanced COMLEX-USA blueprint⁷ assesses measureable outcomes of seven Fundamental Osteopathic Medical Competency Domains⁸ and focuses on high frequency clinical presentations or high-impact health issues and clinical presentations that affect patients across the lifespan. For more information on the Enhancing COMLEX-USA, visit the NBOME website.

BACKED BY EXTENSIVE RESEARCH

As part of its research program, NBOME conducts studies designed to help residency program directors understand COMLEX-USA examinations and the validity support for using COMLEX-USA for holistic residency application decisions. A recent study demonstrates a strong association between COMLEX-USA Level 1 and USMLE Step 1 performance of osteopathic medical students who take both examinations.⁹ Understanding the correlation between COMLEX-USA scores and performance on other measures, performance on resident in-training or board certification exams help program directors assess an applicant's potential performance.

SCORE CONCORDANCE STUDIES

- Sandella JM, Gimpel JR, Smith LL, Boulet JR. The use of COMLEX-USA and USMLE for residency applicant selection. *Journal of Graduate Medical Education*. 2016; 8(3):358-363.
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PREDICTIVE VALIDITY PERFORMANCE IN IN-TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION EXAMINATIONS

- O'Neill TR, Peabody MR, Song H. The predictive validity of NBOME's COMLEX-USA with regard to outcomes on ABFM examinations. *Academic Medicine*. 2016;91(11):1568-1575.
- Li F, Gimpel JR, Arenson E, Song H, Bates BP, Ludwin F. The relationship between COMLEX-USA scores and performance on the American Osteopathic Board of Emergency Medicine Part I Certifying Examination. *Journal of the American Osteopathic Association*. 2014;114(4):260-266
- Pierce DL, Mirre-Gonzalez MA, Carter MA, Nug D, Salamanca Y. Performance on COMLEX-USA exams predicts performance on EM residency in-training exams. *Academic Emergency Medicine*. 2013;20(5) Suppl1.
- Langenau EE, Pugliano G, Roberts W. Relationship between high-stakes clinical skills exam scores and program director global competency ratings of first-year pediatric residents. *Medical Education*. 2011;16:7362. DOI: 10.3402/mer.v16i0.7362.
- Langenau EE, Pugliano G, Roberts W, Hostoffer R. Summary of ACOP program directors' annual reports for first-year residents and relationships between resident competency performance ratings and COMLEX-USA test scores. *Electronic Journal of the American College of Osteopathic Pediatricians*. 2010;2(7).

For more information about important research on COMLEX-USA validity and reliability, visit the NBOME website.

www.nbome.org

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2. Frequently Asked Questions: Single Accreditation System. Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME). <https://www.acgme.org/Portals/0/PDFs/Nasca-Community/FAQs.pdf?ver=2017-06-22-110310-923>.
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5. National Resident Matching Program, Data Release and Research Committee: Results of the 2016 NRMP Program Director Survey. National Resident Matching Program, Washington, DC. <http://www.nrmp.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/NRMP-2016-Program-Director-Survey.pdf>.
6. Gimpel JR, Horber D, Sandella JM, Knebl JA, Thornburg JE. Evidence-based redesign of the COMLEX-USA series. *Journal of the American Osteopathic Association*. 2017;117(4):253-261.
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