



**NBOME**  
NATIONAL BOARD OF OSTEOPATHIC MEDICAL EXAMINERS

MAY 2014

# ENHANCING COMPLEX-USA

2014 UPDATES BY THE BLUE RIBBON PANEL  
OF THE NATIONAL BOARD OF OSTEOPATHIC  
MEDICAL EXAMINERS



**NBOME'S MISSION** ▶ TO PROTECT THE PUBLIC BY PROVIDING  
THE MEANS TO ASSESS COMPETENCIES FOR OSTEOPATHIC MEDICINE  
AND RELATED HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONS

## BACKGROUND

The Comprehensive Osteopathic Medical Licensure Examination of the United States (COMLEX-USA), the NBOME signature examination series, is widely used for licensure of osteopathic physicians in the United States. It is the primary means by which the NBOME delivers on its mission “to protect the public by providing the means to assess competencies for osteopathic physicians and related health care professions.”

In response to substantive changes in the evolution of osteopathic medical practice, and to ensure COMLEX-USA remained current in meeting the needs of the state medical licensing boards and other stakeholders, the NBOME Board and leadership first addressed a comprehensive review of the examination series in 2006. In 2007, an official review was commissioned and a respected group of experts was assembled that included state medical board representatives, leadership and faculty members from colleges of osteopathic medicine and graduate medical education programs, physicians in private practice, students, residents, and other content and testing experts.

Numerous NBOME committees, subcommittees and task forces met to evaluate the content, format and consequences of the COMLEX-USA series, and to devise a plan for assuring that it will continue to elevate the breadth and quality of assessment to meet the expectations of the profession and the public. Their collective objectives were, as they are today, to:

- › Stay meaningful and relevant in the licensing process,
- › Elevate the breadth and quality of assessment to meet the expectations of the profession and the public – reliability and validity remain paramount, and
- › Ensure continuous quality improvement in protecting the public.

The NBOME’s Blueprint Audit Committee and its Committee on Competency Assessment were critical to the review process. The latter Committee published “The Seven Osteopathic Medical Competencies: Considerations for Future Testing and the Practice of Osteopathic Medicine” in 2007. An updated version, “The Fundamental Osteopathic Medical Competencies: Guidelines for Osteopathic Medical Licensure and the Practice of Osteopathic Medicine,” was published in 2009.

In 2011, the NBOME Board of Directors adopted the “Fundamental Osteopathic Medical Competency Domains: Guidelines for Osteopathic Medical Licensure and the Practice of Osteopathic Medicine” (FOMCD), as an update to the former document. The FOMCD considers these domains predominantly from the assessment perspective, particularly as related to licensure for osteopathic medical practice. The 2011 update was authored by the NBOME’s Blue Ribbon Panel on Enhancing COMLEX-USA (see next section), with contributions from a wide array of experts on the required elements and measurable outcomes for the seven core competency domains, as related to the practice of osteopathic medicine. This document can be found on the NBOME website at [www.nbome.org](http://www.nbome.org).



## BLUE RIBBON PANEL ON ENHANCING COMLEX-USA

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In June 2009, the NBOME Board agreed to move forward with plans to further study and implement a future design for COMLEX-USA. The Blue Ribbon Panel on Enhancing COMLEX-USA was assembled to establish a framework based on the stated criteria and current directions in assessment standards in medical education and practice. It was important that the Blue Ribbon Panel's work consider both the primary use (licensure), which supports the organization's ultimate mission of protecting the public, and important secondary uses (undergraduate and graduate medical education) of the COMLEX-USA examination series. Therefore, the Panel was comprised of members of the NBOME Board of Directors, as well as members from the following organizations:

- › Accreditation Council on Graduate Medical Education (ACGME)
- › American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (AACOM)
- › American Association of Osteopathic Examiners (AAOE)
- › American Osteopathic Association (AOA)
- › Association of Osteopathic Directors and Medical Educators (AODME)
- › Educational Council for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG)
- › Educational Council on Osteopathic Principles (ECOP)
- › Federation of State Medical Boards (FSMB), and
- › Organization of Program Directors Associations (OPDA).

In addition to the esteemed membership of the NBOME's Blue Ribbon Panel on Enhancing COMLEX-USA, the committee called upon highly renowned experts in the field of medical education and clinical assessment as part of the comprehensive review of the examination series and the exploration of enhancements to its redesign.

## APPROVAL OF THE NEW COMLEX-USA EXAMINATION SERIES BLUEPRINT

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After four years of extensive research, expert collaboration, stakeholder surveying, and planning, the Blue Ribbon Panel presented its recommendations to the NBOME Board for approval at its December 2013 meeting. The original ten recommendations presented by the Blue Ribbon Panel can be found in the March 2012 publication, "Enhancing COMLEX-USA: Report by the Blue Ribbon Panel of the National Board of Osteopathic Medical Examiners" accessible by clicking [here](http://www.nbome.org/publications.asp?m=inf) (<http://www.nbome.org/publications.asp?m=inf>).

## BLUEPRINT: TWO DISTINCT DIMENSIONS AND TWO DISTINCT DECISION POINTS

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Based on expert consensus and research reviewed by the Blue Ribbon Panel, a new two-dimensional blueprint was developed and approved by the NBOME Board in 2013. The foundation of COMLEX-USA is based upon the osteopathic philosophy of whole person healthcare; underlying structure-function

relationships and the interdependence of body systems; self-healing and self-regulatory mechanisms; and, the osteopathic approach to patient care, including osteopathic manipulative medicine.

The table below illustrates the two dimensions of the new blueprint: Competency Domains and Clinical Presentations. The following definitions provide context for the use of the terms “Competency Domains” and “Clinical Presentations” throughout this document. *Competency Domains* are a set of elements and outcomes that demonstrate knowledge, skill sets, experience, values, and behaviors related to the practice of osteopathic medicine. A *Clinical Presentation* represents the manner in which a particular patient, group of patients or community may present to osteopathic physicians.

<b>COMPETENCY DOMAINS DIMENSION I:</b>	<b>CLINICAL PRESENTATIONS DIMENSION II:</b>
Osteopathic Principles & Practice and Osteopathic Manipulative Treatment	Community Health and Presentations related to Wellness
Osteopathic Patient Care	Patient Presentations related to Human Development and Sexuality
Application of Knowledge for Osteopathic Medical Practice	Patient Presentations related to the Endocrine System and Metabolism
Practice-Based Learning and Improvement in Osteopathic Medicine	Patient Presentations related to the Nervous System and Mental Health
Interpersonal and Communication Skills in the Practice of Osteopathic Medicine	Patient Presentations related to the Musculoskeletal System
Professionalism in the Practice of Osteopathic Medicine	Patient Presentations related to the Genitourinary System and Reproductive Health
Systems-Based Practice in Osteopathic Medicine	Patient Presentations related to the Gastrointestinal System and Nutritional Health
	Patient Presentations related to the Circulatory and Hematologic Systems
	Patient Presentations related to the Respiratory System
	Patient Presentations related to the Integumentary System

Assessment at each decision point across defined parameters for demographics and context of care include:

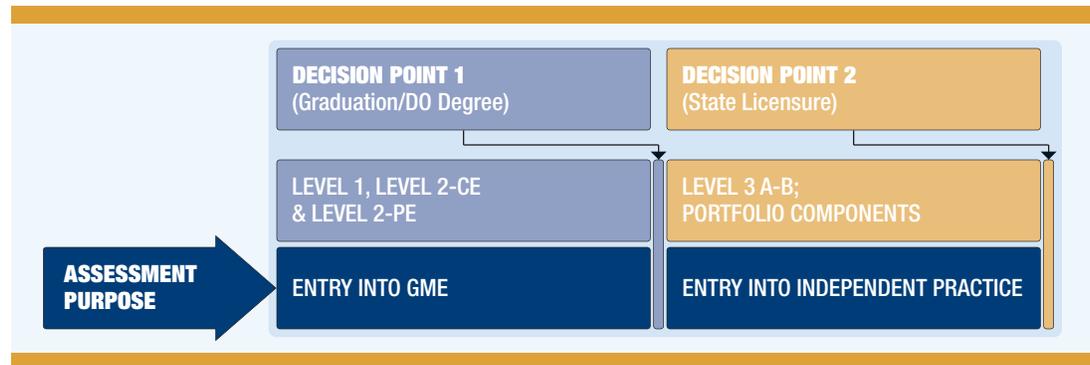
- Patient Demographics: Age/Lifecycle, Gender, Race, Ethnicity, Special Populations, and
- Context of Care: Ambulatory/Outpatient, Hospital Inpatient, Emergency Settings, Convalescent/Palliative/Other; Acuity (acute, sub-acute, chronic).

Examinees will be required to demonstrate minimal competency at each distinct decision point across the seven domains of competency for the practice of osteopathic medicine. The NBOME is exploring ways to assess various milestones and entrustable professional activities as part of a portfolio

COMLEX-USA

component to the enhanced COMLEX-USA. Where possible, harmonization with existing assessment paradigms required across the education and training continuum will be considered.

The Blue Ribbon Panel's outline for a new, **two-decision point**, competency-based COMLEX-USA is depicted below:



## IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE

The Blue Ribbon Panel's recommendations for an enhanced COMLEX-USA Examination Series blueprint and the implementation plan were presented during several, key stakeholder conferences in April 2014 including the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine, the Educational Council on Osteopathic Principles, the Federation of State Medical Boards, and the Association of Osteopathic Directors and Medical Educators. The premise behind NBOME's early announcement was to allow the osteopathic community and key stakeholders ample time to prepare for the implementation of the enhanced blueprint. The targeted implementation schedule for the enhanced blueprint is illustrated in the chart below.

COMLEX-USA				
Level 1	400 predominantly multiple-choice questions (MCQs)	1 DAY	2019	DECISION POINT 1
Level 2-CE	400 predominantly MCQs	1 DAY	2019	
Level 2-PE	12 station SP-based/OSCE-type Performance Evaluation	1 DAY	2019	
COMLEX-USA				
Level 3 A	MCQs and novel item formats to assess expanded competency subsets including portfolio components, Part 1	1 DAY	2018	DECISION POINT 2
Level 3 B	MCQs and novel item formats to assess expanded competency subsets including portfolio components, Part 2	1 DAY	2018	

## TARGETED TRANSITION AT-A-GLANCE

### DECISION POINT 2

<b>FEBRUARY 2018</b>	No COMLEX-USA Level 3 administered (those who have not completed Level 3 will need to take new Level 3-A and 3-B hereafter)
<b>MARCH 2018</b>	New COMLEX-USA Level 3-A and Level 3-B administered for the first time, with possibility of a Portfolio requirement

### DECISION POINT 1

<b>MARCH 2019</b>	New COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE administered
<b>MAY 2019</b>	New COMLEX-USA Level 1 administered
<b>JUNE 2019</b>	New COMLEX-USA Level 2-CE administered

## NEXT STEPS

The NBOME Blue Ribbon Panel implementation of the COMLEX-USA Examination Series blueprint enhancements will be finalized between 2014 and 2016, during which ongoing work, including the following, will continue:

- 1** Portfolio and Expanded Assessment Task Force to focus on Competency Domains, required elements, and measurable outcomes along with potential Portfolio components and harmonizing with existing assessment paradigms across the education and training continuum,
- 2** Blueprint Workgroup will continue analysis and definitions of Clinical Presentation subcategories for the new COMLEX-USA blueprint,
- 3** Ongoing novel test item development and pilot testing including clinical decision-making/key features item types,
- 4** Implementation of eSOAP computer keyboard entry of post-encounter notes in COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE in July 2014, and
- 5** Annual updates to the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME), American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (AACOM), American Association of Osteopathic Examiners (AAOE), American Osteopathic Association (AOA), Association of Osteopathic Directors and Medical Educators (AODME), Council of Interns and Residents (CIR), Council of Osteopathic Student Government Presidents (COSGP), Educational Council on Osteopathic Principles (ECOP), Federation of State Medical Boards (FSMB) and other stakeholders.

For more information on the Blue Ribbon Panel, visit [www.nbome.org/publications](http://www.nbome.org/publications).