# The Sars-CoV-2 Pandemic's Impact on United States Medical Licensing Examination Testing: Student **Perspectives**

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## Background

- American Residency Programs have identified United States Medical Licensing Examinations (USMLE) Step 1 and Step 2 scores as top factors in deciding which applicants to interview.1
- During the SARS-CoV-2 Pandemic, students with USMLE exam dates between March 18 and May 1 had their exams cancelled, affecting up to 17,000 students.2
- · The National Board of Medical Examiners (NBME) and Prometric took until May 18 (63 days) to release a plan to ameliorate testing.
- This plan included select medical schools gradually serving as regional USMLE testing sites beginning May 27, 2020.3 We hypothesize students are dissatisfied with this response and aim to determine other student impacts and reflections

on how the NBME and Prometric could improve services.

# Methodology

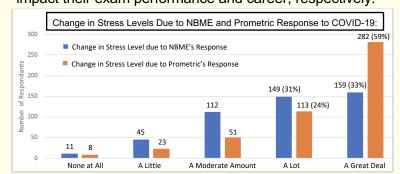
- We created a 33 item survey containing multiple choice questions, Likert scales, and open-ended prompts.
- Distributed via AAMC Organization of Student
- Representatives (OSR) contact list. 21 medical schools surveyed → 570 responses received →
- 483 responses with > 50% completion used in analysis.
- We used paired t-tests to determine statistical significance of change in student's perceived levels of stress, and ANOVA to analyze statistical significance of multiple variables.
- Free-text response themes developed by GB and BB and reviewed by JD.

#### **Quantitative Results**

- **79%** of respondents experienced a USMLE cancellation.
- average, students needed to reschedule 2.53 times.
- While rescheduling, **60%** of students were offered a false exam date by the Prometric scheduling interface.

# Quantitative Results (cont.)

- 5% of students felt the NBME had an adequate pandemic response.
- After scheduling delays, 69% of students felt "very stressed" about their USMLE, compared to 3% at baseline.
- 67% and 65% of students felt scheduling delays would "negatively" or "very negatively" impact their exam performance and career, respectively.



- 92% of students felt that medical schools should have been allowed to administer USMLE exams during the pandemic.\*
- 92% of students felt medical schools should administer USMLE exams long-term.
- One student cited a "fantastic testing experience" at a medical school test site.

Prometric Provided Adequate

Communication to Students in

Response to Social Distancing

Requirements During COVID-19.

## **Qualitative Results**

- Common themes included: Feedback for NBME (n=35)
  - Scheduling allowed at closed Prometric sites (n=32)
  - Prometric email notification system failures (n=32) Instances of student mental health decline (n=27)

  - Prometric closed phone lines, local and national (n=21) Student concerns regarding test score validity (n=10)

 Questioning NBME financial gains from USMLE testing (n=26) "Decouple the administration of mandatory licensing

exams from the financing of the licensing board. The current set-up **only incentivizes** the NBME to further increase the costs of its already over-priced exams, and disincentivizes them from responding to a crisis like COVID-19."



#### Discussion

- The NBME and Prometric did not provide a timely or equitable solution to pandemic-related USMLE cancellations, exacerbating student distrust towards this entities.
- Should medical students be afforded greater stakeholder status and transparency regarding the USMLE and test fees? Students overwhelmingly support testing at medical schools,
- as the NBME continues to test through Prometric. How might residency programs utilize test scores given these
- circumstances and the transition to P/F for Step 1 in 2022? Mentors and advisors may wish to offer additional support to
- affected rising 4th year medical students.

# Limitations

Our 483 analyzed surveys represent a small sample size and possible respondent bias. Two authors experienced cancellations.

#### References

- 1. National Resident Matching Program, Data Release and Research Committee: Results of the 2018 NRMF Program Director Survey, National Resident Matching Program, Washington, DC, 2018.
- 2. Krupp L. USMLE Testing Chaos May Harm Current and Future Doctors.

https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/932366. Accessed July 1 2020.

3. USMLE. Announcements. 2020. https://www.usmle.org/announcements/. Accessed June 30, 2020.

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Tompkins, Katherine Van Deventer, MD, McKenzi Yocus survey was written and distributed prior to the May 18 announcement revealing a plan\* to begin testing at medical schools.