

# FACT SHEET

## COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE

June 2010

### The Performance Evaluation Component

### of the Comprehensive Osteopathic Medical Licensure Examination Level 2

*The National Board of Osteopathic Medical Examiners (NBOME) includes a standardized patient-based clinical skills examination in the COMLEX-USA examination series. COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE is administered at the NBOME National Center for Clinical Skills Testing in Conshohocken, Pennsylvania (near Philadelphia). This FACT SHEET is intended for informational purposes only, and regular updates regarding the COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE will be posted on the NBOME website ([www.nbome.org](http://www.nbome.org)).*

---

### **What clinical skills are being assessed by COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE?**

The examination measures doctor-patient communication, interpersonal skills, professionalism, medical history-taking, physical examination skills including osteopathic palpatory skills, osteopathic manipulative treatment and osteopathic principles, written communication skills in the form of a “SOAP” note, and some aspects of clinical problem-solving, integrated differential diagnosis, and formulation of a therapeutic plan. These skills are all assessed in the context of clinical encounters with standardized patients. Both spoken and written English language proficiency are needed to demonstrate these skills.

### **Since the skills of osteopathic medical students are evaluated at their schools and on clinical rotations, isn't COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE redundant?**

The American public relies on a medical credentialing system that requires physician candidates be evaluated against a common standard. For example, all osteopathic medical schools teach and evaluate knowledge of anatomy as well as pharmacology, but all students are required to pass written COMLEX components as an independent evaluation of this knowledge. The state medical licensing boards and the public rely on NBOME for this independent assessment of medical proficiencies. There is currently a public mandate for programs aimed at reducing medical errors as well as medical malpractice, many incidences of which are directly related to deficiencies in clinical skills and doctor-patient communication. Additionally, there is significant variation among the osteopathic medical colleges in assessment of clinical skills. Finally, numerous studies in medical education document the lack of actual verification of clinical skills and even the lack of direct observation of these skills. Recognizing the importance of COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE to the profession and to the public, the American Osteopathic Association's House of Delegates formally endorsed the addition of COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE into NBOME's COMLEX-USA at its July 2003 annual meeting.

### **If there is variation in clinical skills training, especially in the area of osteopathic manipulative treatment, will some students be disadvantaged in taking COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE?**

Representatives from the Educational Council on Osteopathic Principles (ECOP) as well as faculty representatives from each of the osteopathic colleges have provided input in the areas of examination content, case development, and standard-setting. This helps to ensure standardization in osteopathic skills being measured.

### **How else are fairness, objectivity, and reliability assured?**

Research and development since 1996, as well as further validation since implementation in 2004, has provided ample evidence to support the use of COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE for assessing the clinical skills of osteopathic medical graduates. The standardized patients as well as osteopathic physician examiners are highly trained, and rigorous, industry-standard quality control measures are employed. Representatives from every college of osteopathic medicine have been involved in examination development and in setting the standards. Case development committee members, standard setting committee members, and osteopathic physician examiners scoring written “SOAP” notes and osteopathic manipulative treatment are balanced to attempt to achieve broad representation with respect to native regions of the country, osteopathic medical specialties, gender, ethnicity, and other variables. Reproducibility of COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE scores is comparable to that found in other standardized patient examinations used for high-stakes board certification and licensure. This fairness and reproducibility is enhanced by delivering COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE at a single national clinical skills testing center.

### **Doesn't the computerized COMLEX-USA identify students with deficiencies in clinical skills?**

The multiple-choice COMLEX levels assess the candidate's understanding of medical knowledge. In our studies, there is only a very modest correlation between performance on multiple-choice examinations of medical knowledge and clinical skills performance. The experience of the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates, the National Board of Medical Examiners, and the Medical Council of Canada, all of whom require a clinical skills examination for certification or licensure, is similar. Many candidates may pass the multiple-choice examinations, but not possess the ability or the clinical skills to succeed in clinical encounters with patients.

### **What other testing organizations utilize a clinical skills examination?**

The Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates joined the National Board of Medical Examiners and the Federation of State Medical Boards in 2004 to deliver USMLE Step 2 Clinical Skills, a 12-station clinical skills exam required for all U.S. allopathic and international medical graduates. The Medical Council of Canada has utilized a standardized patient-based clinical skills examination as Part II of their Qualifying Examination for Canadian medical licensure for well over a decade.

### **What will the examination be like for the candidates?**

Each candidate will have 12 simulated clinical encounters with standardized patients, primarily modeled on visits to outpatient primary care settings. Cases are developed by osteopathic physicians. These common clinical scenarios meet a blueprint that is based on national databases of actual osteopathic physician encounters with patients as well as the Dimension I axis of the blueprint for COMLEX-USA. The clinical encounters last 14 minutes, allowing the candidate to evaluate and treat the patient according to the patient's presenting complaint. After the encounter, the candidate has nine additional minutes to complete a written SOAP note. Including

orientation and breaks, each examination lasts approximately seven hours. NBOME's 28-minute **Instructional Program Video** is available through the NBOME website. Details regarding examination logistics, a virtual tour, and excerpts from sample cases are shown on this video and are also detailed in the **Orientation Guide for COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE**, which is available on the NBOME website.

## **How is COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE scored?**

Candidates will receive one score of "Pass" or "Fail" for the examination. Successful passing of COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE requires that the candidate pass each of two examination domains: the **Biomedical/Biomechanical Domain** (assessing skills in history-taking, physical examination skills including osteopathic palpatory skills, osteopathic manipulative treatment, written communication skills in the form of a "SOAP" note, and some aspects of clinical problem-solving, integrated differential diagnosis, and formulation of a therapeutic plan), and the **Humanistic Domain** (assessing skills in doctor-patient communication, interpersonal skills and professionalism; assessing dimensions including ability to elicit information, listening skills, giving information, respectfulness, empathy and professionalism). Highly trained standardized patients document history-taking and physical examination, and also evaluate doctor-patient communication skills. Trained osteopathic physician examiners score osteopathic manipulative evaluation and treatment and the written SOAP notes. Candidates can expect to receive their scores within 8-10 weeks of taking the examination, though there may be additional delays that are dependent on candidate testing and other variables that are not within NBOME's control. In the event that a candidate does not pass, he or she will be able to reschedule for a retake examination upon receipt of the initial score report. For more information, consult the **COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE Score Reporting FAQ document** on the website.

## **Why can't osteopathic physician candidates take USMLE's clinical skills examination?**

While they can, COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE is a clinical skills examination with an examination blueprint designed to assess osteopathic students. The blueprint reflects the distinctive practice of *osteopathic* medicine. All of the clinical cases are written by osteopathic physicians, and edited and refined by a case development committee comprised of osteopathic medical educators and clinicians. There is an appropriate emphasis on the palpatory component of physical examination, the patient-centered approach, and osteopathic manipulative treatment and the neuromusculoskeletal system as appropriate for osteopathic medical practice. The most appropriate evaluation tool for any profession is one designed particularly for that purpose. Additionally, seven osteopathic medical boards require COMLEX for licensure. In these states, USMLE does not satisfy their requirements.

## **Who will be eligible to take COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE? Who is required to take it?**

COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE is a separate component of COMLEX-USA Level 2, such that Level 2 now has a cognitive evaluation (Level 2-CE now delivered as a one-day examination via computer) as well as a clinical skills/performance component (COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE). Students in good standing at AOA COCA-accredited colleges of osteopathic medicine who have passed COMLEX-USA Level 1 are eligible to take each of the COMLEX-USA Level 2 components (in any sequence). Candidates are now required to take and pass COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE to establish eligibility for the Level 3 exam. Students graduating from any medical school who plan to be licensed in the United States via any pathway are now required to have passed a national clinical skills examination. Additionally, the AOA Commission on Osteopathic College Accreditation requires that all students take Level 2-PE prior to graduation, and, effective in the year 2008, all osteopathic medical students will be required to pass Level 2-PE prior to graduation.

## **Will there be sufficient opportunities for me to take COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE?**

The NBOME National Center for Clinical Skills Testing in the Philadelphia area operates 12 months throughout the year, with examination administrations on weekdays and weekends as well as double testing sessions (morning and afternoon/evening sessions) on certain days. NBOME's automated online registration and scheduling system is available via the website. Eligible candidates may schedule up to 12 months in advance. Candidates who anticipate clinical training in the Philadelphia area or those who have other scheduling needs to meet graduation or residency program requirements would be advised to schedule as early in their fourth year as possible (and no later than January 31).

## **What does this examination cost for candidates?**

The expense of reliable high-stakes performance testing utilizing standardized patients can be prohibitive for some schools interested in starting such programs themselves. Unfortunately, the expense of licensing candidates without certification of proficiency in clinical skills may be much greater. NBOME has invested considerable resources in research and development of COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE, to assure the highest quality examination and to minimize the cost for the candidates. The examination fee for 2010-11 is \$1120. Penalties for canceling and rescheduling COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE are detailed in the **Bulletin of Information**.

## **What is the Pass Rate for COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE?**

Over the last five testing cycles (2004-05 through 2008-09), the average pass rate was 94.5% for first time takers.

## **Will there be additional testing sites in the future?**

Increases in the number of osteopathic medical students may make a second testing center economically and psychometrically feasible sometime in the future. With only 4200 -4400 total graduates annually, the addition of a second testing site at this point would result in examination fees that would be 40-50% higher than current fees. In response to the modest increase in students, we have expanded our testing capacity at our Conshohocken facility to accommodate students' testing needs.

## **Where can I learn more about COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE?**

Contact the NBOME National Center for Clinical Skills Testing at 610-825-6551 (toll-free at 1-866-NBOME97) or view the NBOME website ([www.nbome.org](http://www.nbome.org)) for the **Bulletin of Information**, **Orientation Guide**, **28-minute Instructional Program Video**, information on discounted travel and accommodations, and regular updates on COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE.