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COMSAE Phase 1: value added

To the Editor:

We read with interest the Advance Article copy of "Meaningful use of COMSAE Phase 1 in preparation for COMLEX-USA Level 1" [1]. The authors' stated intent was to answer four questions: "How many Phase 1 forms did candidates take prior to Level 1? What was the correlation between Level 1 and Phase 1 scores? Did Phase 1 performance improve as more forms were taken? Did the Phase 1 test taking experience help with the preparation for Level 1?" The authors answered the first three, while the fourth question, "Did the Phase 1 test taking experience help with the preparation for Level 1?," requires more than descriptive statistics to answer. We therefore pose a permutation of the fourth question: How should students, faculty, and academic advisors use information received from Phase 1 score reports to guide Level 1 exam preparation? The existing literature provides some observations to consider.

Jackson et al. [2] surveyed 171 students in the class of 2019 at the University of New England College of Osteopathic Medicine. Among 102 respondents, the correlation of the timing of the Comprehensive Medical Self Assessment Examination (COMSAE) to the Comprehensive Osteopathic Medical Licensing Examination of the United States (COMLEX-USA) Level 1 was notably stronger during the second administration (December, r=0.25; April, r=0.61). Further, they reported that the United States Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE) Step 1 and COMLEX-USA Level 1 were correlated (r=0.78) and students who took Step 1 performed better on the Level 1 than those who did not (Level 1 mean scores of 633 vs. 553, respectively). Maholtz et al. [3] reported that 399 survey respondents from 13 COMs valued practice questions and time to prepare for the Level 1 more than other preparation resources and variables. Vora et al. [4] noted that earlier initiation of Level 1 preparation was 2.5 times more likely among 113 students scoring >600 at Nova Southeastern University College of Osteopathic Medicine.

We agree with Wang et al. [1] that COMSAE Phase 1 has predictive validity and Phase 1 scores increase with serial testing. With that said, students, faculty, and advisors need more robust information to guide and support examination preparation and resource selection. As the Level 1 moves to pass/fail reporting effective in May 2022 [5], we urge all educators and researchers to continue efforts to help colleges of osteopathic medicine better understand the following:

- Beyond predictive value (pass/fail), how can the Phase 1 report help students at risk of failing Level 1 allocate their study time and select resources aligned with their individual needs?
- Does time spent focusing on learning content in weaker disciplines lead to higher scores?
- Does preparation for USMLE Step 1 improve performance on COMLEX-USA Level 1?
- What feedback needs to be included in Phase 1 and Level 1 score reports to help faculty evaluate and improve instructional and assessment activities in their programs?
- What information will residency program directors substitute for the Level 1 numeric scores as they consider which applicants to interview?

As the next generation of osteopathic physicians is trained, we stand ready to work collaboratively with our colleagues to answer these and additional questions. We look forward to learning together!

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ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

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