

# 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.<sup>1</sup>
- 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.<sup>2</sup>
- 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.<sup>3</sup>
- 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

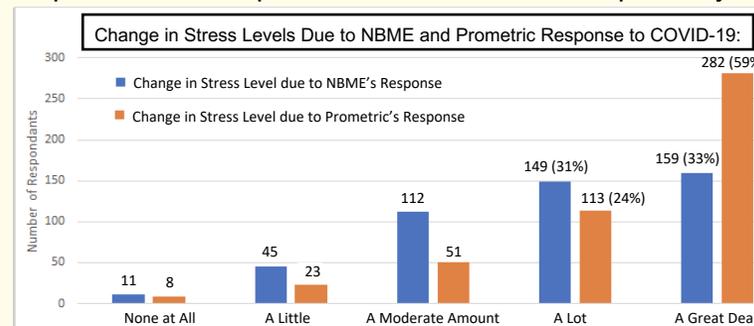
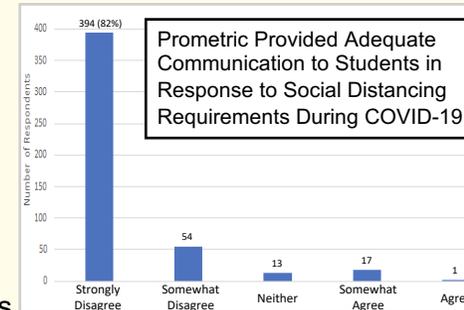
- We created a 33 item survey containing multiple choice questions, Likert scales, and open-ended prompts.
- Distributed via AAMC Organization of Student Representatives (OSR) contact list.
- 21 medical schools surveyed → 570 responses received → 483 responses with > 50% completion used in analysis.
- 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.
- On 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.

## 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)
  - Feedback for NBME (n=26)
    - Questioning NBME financial gains from USMLE testing (n=26)

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*"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 these 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 4<sup>th</sup> year medical students.

## Limitations

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

## References

- National Resident Matching Program, Data Release and Research Committee: Results of the 2018 NRMP Program Director Survey. National Resident Matching Program, Washington, DC. 2018.
- Krupp L. USMLE Testing Chaos May Harm Current and Future Doctors. <https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/932366>. Accessed July 1 2020.
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\*survey was written and distributed prior to the May 18 announcement revealing a plan to begin testing at medical schools.