

REPORT OF THE COUNCIL ON MEDICAL EDUCATION

CME Report 4-A-12

Subject: Use of USMLE and COMLEX Items for Purposes Other than the Assessment of Physicians and Physicians-in-Training

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1 Policy H35.972[6] asks that our American Medical Association (AMA) “continue to monitor the
2 use of questions developed for the USMLE and COMLEX by any group for purposes other than
3 the assessment of physicians-in-training and report back to the House of Delegates by the 2012
4 Annual Meeting.”

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6 This informational report summarizes the literature that is publically available, for example from
7 annual reports and on websites, related to the incorporation of items that were previously used in
8 the United States Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE) or the Comprehensive Osteopathic
9 Medical Licensing Examination (COMLEX-USA) in examinations for other health professionals.

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11 THE NATIONAL BOARD OF MEDICAL EXAMINERS AND USMLE EXAMINATION
12 ITEMS

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14 The USMLE is a three-examination sequence that is sponsored by the Federation of State Medical
15 Boards (FSMB) and the National Board of Medical Examiners (NBME®). The Composite
16 Committee, which establishes policies for the USMLE program, has members representing the
17 FSMB, the NBME, the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG®), and
18 the public.¹

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20 According to the NBME Web site, testing, consultative, and research services are provided to a
21 variety of organizations, including medical specialty boards and societies, the veterinary licensing
22 board, and allied health professional organizations.² The non-physician organizations listed as
23 working with the NBME, in addition to the veterinary licensing board, are the American
24 Association of Medical Assistants; the American Board of Comprehensive Care; the American
25 Board of Medical Genetics, which certifies both physicians and non-physicians; and the American
26 Board of Physical Therapy Specialists.² Testing services include such things as exam development
27 (conducting practice analyses, developing examination blueprints, selecting assessment methods)
28 and item development (conducting item writing workshops, editing items, and facilitating item
29 review meetings).⁵

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31 Of the non-physician organizations working with the NBME, the only organization that is known
32 to incorporate previous items from the USMLE is the American Board of Comprehensive Care
33 (ABCC). The ABCC is an organization founded in 2007 to certify graduates of Doctor of Nursing
34 Practice (DNP) programs.³ The ABCC and the NBME reached an agreement in 2008 to develop
35 and administer an examination for the certification of advanced practice registered nurses who are
36 graduates of DNP programs.³ According to the NBME, the certification examination uses items
37 “retired from the USMLE” and states that the examination serves a different purpose.⁴ The

1 decision about test design is made by a committee appointed by the Council for the Advancement
 2 of Comprehensive Care.⁴ The DNP certifying examination has been offered annually for three
 3 years. Data on the number of examinees and the pass rates follow in Table 1.

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 6 Table 1
 7 Pass Rates for the DNP Certification Examination³
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9 Year	Number Tested	Pass Rate for First-time Takers
10 2008	45	49%
11 2009	19	57%
12 2010	31	45%

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 18 There are no published data on whether retired USMLE examinations are being used in other
 19 examinations for non-physicians.

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 21 **THE NATIONAL BOARD OF OSTEOPATHIC MEDICAL EXAMINERS AND COMLEX-USA**
 22 **EXAM ITEMS**

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 24 The COMLEX-USA is a three-level examination developed by the National Board of Osteopathic
 25 Medical Examiners (NBOME).⁶ There are no published data on the use of any COMLEX-USA
 26 test items in examinations for individuals who are not students in or graduates of colleges of
 27 osteopathic medicine.

REFERENCES

1. NBME Bulletin. Accessed at <http://www.usmle.org/bulletin/overview/>
2. NBME. Health Professions Services. Organizations that Work with the NBME. Accessed at <http://www.nbme.org/HealthpProfessions-Services/affiliate-organizations.html>
3. American Board of Comprehensive Care. History. Accessed at <http://www.abcc.dnpcert.org/history.shtml>
4. NBME newsroom. DNP certifying Examination -Q&A. Accessed at <http://www.nbme.org/NewsRoom/DNP.html>
5. NBME Annual Report 2010. Services for Health Profession Organizations. Accessed at <http://www.nbme.org/PDF/Publications/Annual-Report.pdf>
6. National Board of Osteopathic Medical Examiners. 2010 Annual Report. Accessed at <http://www.nbome.org/NBOME.2010.Annual.Rept>