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May 5, 2020

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Jo Wiederhorn
President & Chief Executive Officer
AMSNY
1270 Avenue of the Americas
Suite 606
New York, NY

Dear Ms. Wiederhorn:

The authors of this appeal represent over 20,000 physician, resident, and medical student members of the Medical Society of the State of New York (MSSNY). We thank you for working diligently over the past several weeks to adapt and deliver premium medical education to the medical students of New York. We write to bring your attention to the crisis for current second and rising fourth year medical students in the State of NY and to amplify the severe stress and anxiety among all medical students as a result of the COVID pandemic. A central focus of these stressors are the problems surrounding the Prometric Testing Site administration of the USMLE and COMLEX-USA examinations, and the imposed deadlines and criteria for sitting for, and passing the examinations required by the AMSNY Member Medical Schools and Colleges. We urge you to work with other AMSNY Deans to promptly implement needed changes to the USMLE and COMLEX-USA exam requirements and the challenges surrounding them.

That these examinations are considered high stakes is well known, but the stresses worsened this year because of uncertainty surrounding exam dates, delayed notification of Prometric exam test center closings, indiscriminate cancellation of test dates for "social distancing" needs, confusing notices sent by the testing center that do not specify which examination (USMLE or COMLEX-USA) has been unilaterally cancelled or postponed, and the adverse impacts these have on student test preparation.

Prometric has announced that they are soon reopening testing centers which, at this time, would place students and those close to them at risk of serious illness or possibly death. Since NY and the Northeast have been more severely impacted by COVID, NY medical students have been placed at a serious disadvantage in seeking to achieve competitive scores on these exams. We at MSSNY believe that rapid action is needed to alleviate severe stress placed on NY medical students and to level the playing field for New York medical students with medical students in schools or regions less adversely impacted by the pandemic.

Our reasons for writing come after we reviewed survey results administered to your Member Institutions to assess the impact of COVID on the personal lives and ability for students to prepare for NBME and NBOME exams. An overwhelming response from *over 500* medical students was compiled. See Appendix A. The Medical Student Section found that:

- Nearly 86% report feeling increased stressed at this time
- Over 55% reported difficulty in maintaining academic performance
- Over 84% report that pandemic-related issues interfere with exam preparations
- Nearly 86%%, if given time and opportunity (and freed from other responsibilities such as USMLE and COMLEX-USA) would take a role in COVID response efforts

Several troubling themes emerged from the hundreds of individual comments including: being ill, loss of close relatives to COVID, fears for safety of family/friend/self, food insecurity, unstable resources, difficulty concentrating on exam preparation, exam cancellations too close to testing dates resulting in lost study time, money, and effort, troubling internal ethical conflict between studying vs. assisting the COVID response, direct care obligations for children or family that makes it nearly entirely impossible conditions to prepare for USMLE or COMLEX-USA.

USMLE Step 2 CS and COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE specifically are a key area of concern. With the process challenges before us of limited test site availability, scheduling obstacles and test delays, we ask that USMLE Step 2 and COMLEX-USA Level 2 administration and pass requirements be waived for the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 as possible for academic years to allow stability for the examiners and students alike.

Some students prefer to take these exams now, but Prometric does not have the capability to meet this year's exam load. To address these concerns, we strongly recommend that the medical schools collaborate with Prometric, NBME, and NBOME to administer and proctor USMLE Step or COMLEX-USA exams on medical school campuses. Such coordination should include multiple dates and allow students to take the exam at their home institution or another school that works best for them. Such coordination should adhere to best social distancing recommendations so that students and residents are placed at the least risk possible. A central theme of student stress has been a lack of clarity. It is our hope that if all school administrations eliminate deadlines for this cycle, and engage in clear and timely communications with their students, this will relieve unnecessary stress.

The solutions we propose are that standardized testing not be required by schools for advancement or serving clinical rotations and that students be allowed flexibility in test-taking at this time, and furthermore:

- 1) waive USMLE and COMLEX-USA test deadlines and individual school test requirements for the USMLE and COMLEX-USA examinations.
- 2) ensure that no student is penalized with delays in advancement in education/training as a result of taking the USMLE or COMLEX-USA exam at an alternative time,
- 3) eliminate the requirement to pass USMLE Step 2 CS or Comlex-USA Level 2 PE for graduation, and
- 4) support MSSNY in seeking that Step 2 CK and COMLEX-USA Level 2 CE be temporarily made pass/fail for the Class of 2021 and USMLE Step 1 and COMLEX-USA Level 1 pass/fail for the Class of 2022.

The wellbeing of all students and equitable high-quality education are top priorities for the physician community; on this I trust that we agree. In support of our junior colleagues, I urge you to consider partnering with other deans and MSSNY to ensure our success in helping NY students. By providing institutions much needed flexibility, and by working together to make changes, we can assure that students' education and training needs are met. By mitigating the damages already caused by the pandemic on our students' lives through the recommendations discussed above, we will be best able to uphold our commitment of excellence to our future patients.

We look forward to discussing this issue further and hope that we can collaborate and support our medical students. Please let us know if you need additional information.

Sincerely,



Arthur C. Fougner, MD
MSSNY President



Bonnie L. Litvack, MD
MSSNY President-Elect