

MEDICAL BOARD STAFF REPORT

DATE REPORT ISSUED: January 23, 2014  
ATTENTION: Members, Medical Board of California  
SUBJECT: USMLE Passing Scores  
FROM: Curt Worden, Chief of Licensing  
Kerrie Webb, Senior Staff Counsel

REQUESTED ACTION:

Make a motion to reaffirm the Medical Board of California's (Board) practice of accepting the passing score set by the Federation of State Medical Boards as its own passing score on all Steps of the United States Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE).

BACKGROUND:

One of the requirements for an applicant for a physician's and surgeon's certificate is the successful completion of Steps I, II, and III of the USMLE. The creation and administration of the examination is a collaborative effort by the USMLE, the Federation of State Medical Boards and the National Board of Medical Examiners (collectively referred to herein as FSMB). Section 2177 of the Business and Professions Code requires a passing score for an entire examination or for each part of the required licensing examination, as established by the Board. An applicant must pass Step 3 within not more than four attempts in order to be eligible for licensure. However, an applicant who obtains a passing score on Step 3 in more than four attempts, and who meets the requirements of Section 2135.5, is eligible to be considered for licensure.

Pursuant to case law, the Board is required to establish by formal resolution the passing scores for the USMLE for California.

The recommended minimum passing level is reviewed periodically and may be adjusted by the FSMB at any time. For example, at its December 2013 meeting, the Step 1 Committee conducted a review of the USMLE Step 1 examination minimum passing score. As a result of its review, the Step 1 Committee decided to raise the recommended Step 1 minimum passing score from 188 to 192. Similarly, the method in which the scores are reported are reviewed and adjusted as needed.

In the past, the Board has relied on a scaled two-digit score, which is derived from the three-digit score in such a way that a score of 75 corresponds to the minimum passing score. The two-digit score is not as accurate as the three-digit score, and the FSMB is moving away from reporting scores on the two-digit scale. Accordingly, staff recommends the Board remove the reference to the specific passing score of 75, and accept the passing score set by the FSMB as its own passing score on all Steps of the USMLE.