

Step 2: The New Normal

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"Eh, it is just 'Step 2'. I will do fine!" This is a common sentiment seen in most medical students and graduates. After all, Step 2 is about what we learn on our clinical rotations. It is mostly about practical knowledge that is meant to be ingrained in us, thanks to hours of clinical practice. This leaves little need for the endless cycles of mugging and regurgitation. Besides, Step 1 is the 'real beast' we need to sweat over. That is the one program directors really look at! Well unfortunately the glory days of Step 1 are over. With the recent cancellation of Step 1 scores, it is a mere qualification exam and it is finally time for the much-overlooked Step 2 to shine.

Now that all of a sudden Step 1 scores do not matter, medical students and graduates will have to scramble to make their Step 2 scores exemplary. This is doubly true for international medical graduates (IMGs). Why is that? One may wonder!

Well, most IMGs come from curriculums which are somewhat different than the medical schools in the USA. Hence the transcripts do not hold much value, as it is impossible for the program directors to fairly compare the grades given by the different medical schools all over the world to the ones obtained by US medical students [1]. Letters of recommendation (LORs) tend to be subjective (even from US physicians). So the only objective data program directors can assess now are the STEP 2 scores. So how do we go about making sure it is outstanding? By studying of course! But how?

The answer first and foremost still does lie within Step 1. The better prepared you are for step 1 the better prepared you will be for Step 2. There has been in fact, a continuous positive correlation between Step 1 and Step 2 scores [2,3,4]. So even if Step 1 scores do not matter, even if one just has to pass, it is much more prudent to read up and get a strong hold on all Step 1 concepts, as they are the building blocks on which Step 2 questions are based. So, prepare for Step 1 and pretend to aim for a high score even though there isn't one. This will make you that much more prepared for Step 2, which does give a scored report.

When it comes to preparation for Step 2 my go-to has been the U world Q banks. Every single possible detail that can be asked in the test, tends to be covered in U World. But it is not enough just to solve the questions. The real treasure of the U World questions is in the explanations. It is important to read through every line of each explanation and take notes of it. These notes should be your bible. Read it re-read it, understand it, and remember it. And unless you have an eidetic memory, repeat the questions. The more times you repeat it, the more you will remember and the more you will instinctually know what the right answer is. Other than that it is important to sit down and practice all the 'National Board of Medical Examiners' (NBME) self-assessment tests as they are the best indicator of real day test scores time and time again [5].

So take a deep breath and remember, at the end of the day this is just an exam. Hundreds of students have been giving it and performing well. It is most certainly not an impossible feat and as long as you are consistent, good scores are achievable. Lastly good luck and remember you got this!

References

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