



# Research Week 2023

## Medical student perspectives on the change to pass/fail scoring for the USMLE step 1 exam

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### Keywords

USMLE Step 1, Medical Education, Student Wellness

### Abstract

#### Objective

The United States Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE) Step 1 historically reported scores on a numerical scale, but this reporting system changed to pass/fail in January 2022. While there have been a number of studies surrounding residency advisor opinions on the change, there have been very few formal assessments of medical student opinions. The purpose of this study is to investigate Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU) medical student perspectives on the change, specifically regarding wellness and career planning.

#### Methods

Data was collected via a 27-question anonymous Qualtrics survey. Recruitment took place via OHSU email to the School of Medicine Classes of 2024 and 2025. Medical students who took the Step 1 Exam and received a pass/fail report were eligible to participate. Data collection occurred from January to March 2023.

#### Results

99 eligible students completed the survey. 66.7% of students felt that the scoring change overall improved student wellness. However, 52.5% reported “poor” or “terrible” wellness and 38.4% reported feeling anxious “nearly every day” during the 5-week dedicated study period. 29.3% of students reported that the change to a pass/fail output has affected their interest or confidence in pursuing certain specialties, and 75.8% reported feeling pressured to pursue more research and extracurricular activities.

## Conclusions

Despite pass/fail scoring being intended to improve student wellness, a large proportion of medical students continue to experience poor wellness while preparing for the exam. The change has also led to a heightened sense of uncertainty regarding how to prepare for residency. It is imperative that medical schools expand career advising efforts and continually update recommendations for students in order to ensure adequate preparation for residency and their future life as a physician. Students would also benefit from increased transparency from residency programs regarding evaluation metrics that are made clear for each specialty and/or program.

## References

Chretien, K. (2022, January 11). *The Step 1 exam is going pass-fail. Now what?* AAMC. Retrieved March 9, 2023, from <https://www.aamc.org/news-insights/step-1-exam-going-pass-fail-now-what>