The NRMP Residency Match: What Are the Expectations of Osteopathic Medical Students?

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Purpose:
Osteopathic medical students will be facing an ACGME match with USMLE scores at the forefront of their application. This project aims to determine if USMLE Step 1 scores increased from 2009-2017 for successfully matched Western University of Health Sciences College of Osteopathic Medicine of the Pacific (COMP) students from a per residency specialty cohort perspective. This project attempts to analyze the trends that DO students must score higher on the USMLE Step 1 than MD students to be offered similar positions.

Methods:
This is a retrospective study of USMLE scores from successfully matched COMP graduates from 2009-2017. Data was collected from ProgressIQ and de-identified to analyze COMP student licensing exams scores per specialty per year. COMP graduates matching to ACGME programs using USMLE Step 1 scores were also compared to allopathic seniors using publicly available NRMP data from 2009, 2011, 2014, and 2016. This was an IRB approved study that adhered to FERPA regulations.

For the purposes of this study, a successful match did not consider the geographic location of residency, type of residency (e.g., academic vs community), or residency position on the student’s rank list. This study did not investigate if there are ACGME residency programs that do not interview or rank DO students for the purpose of residency match.

Results:
Regarding the ACGME programs, all specialties showed an increased mean USMLE Step 1 score for successfully matched students from a per residency specialty cohort perspective, from 2009-2017, as shown in Table 1. The mean successful USMLE Step 1 score for MD students from 2009-2016 is presented in Table 2 for comparison (2,3,4,5).

Further analyzing the ACGME match, Table 3 compares the successful median USMLE Step 1 scores for COMP seniors from 2016 to 2017 with allopathic seniors from 2016. All specialties showed statistically significant differences in median scores that DOs from COMP matched to ACGME residency programs with lower scores than MDs. These include Family Medicine (FM), Internal Medicine (IM), Pediatrics, and Psychiatry. This data is represented graphically in Figure 1.

Table 1: Mean successful USMLE Step 1 scores of allopathic seniors who matched ACGME

Table 2: Mean successful USMLE Step 1 scores of allopathic seniors who matched ACGME

Table 3: Median successful USMLE Step 1 scores of COMP seniors (DO) and U.S. allopathic seniors (MD) in the ACGME Match

Conclusions:
COMP students taking the USMLE Step 1 and successfully matching to ACGME programs have increased scores over the past decade. It may be helpful for students to prepare for the USMLE with increasing averages in mind for ACGME programs. At least for COMP students, there does not appear to be an obvious bias against DOs in ACGME programs based on USMLE Step 1 scores. Successfully matched COMP student USMLE scores are not statistically significantly higher than respective national averages for U.S. MD students per specialty (Table 3 and Figure 1).

References: