

**NORTH CAROLINA MEDICAL BOARD ORDER POSTPONING USMLE STEP 2 AND
COMLEX-USA LEVEL 2 REQUIREMENTS FOR CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS APPLYING FOR A
RESIDENT TRAINING LICENSE**

WHEREAS, COVID-19 is a respiratory disease that can result in serious illness or death by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which is a new strain of coronavirus previously unidentified in humans and which can spread from person-to-person; and

WHEREAS, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on January 30, 2020; and

WHEREAS, on January 31, 2020, the United States Department of Health and Human Services Secretary declared a public health emergency in the United States for COVID-19 under Section 319 of the Public Health Service Act; and

WHEREAS, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services confirmed multiple cases of COVID-19 in North Carolina as of March 10, 2020; and

WHEREAS, by Executive Order No. 116 on March 10, 2020, North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper declared a State of Emergency for the entire State of North Carolina based on the public health emergency posed by COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, the North Carolina Medical Board (“NCMB”) is an agency of the State of North Carolina organized under Chapter 90 of the North Carolina General Statutes and is charged with the responsibility for licensing physicians, physician assistants, anesthesiologist assistants and perfusionists to practice in North Carolina and regulating such practice in the interest of the public health, safety and welfare; and

WHEREAS, the NCMB has received information that, as a result of COVID-19, the United States Medical Licensing Examination (“USMLE”) and the Comprehensive Osteopathic Medical Licensing Examination (“COMLEX-USA”) have temporarily suspended all Step and Level¹ testing administrations and will not resume until sometime in mid-April 2020 at the earliest; and

WHEREAS, NCMB rule 21 NCAC 32B .1402 requires that USMLE Steps and COMLEX-USA Levels 1 and 2 (both parts) be taken and passed within 3 attempts in order to receive a Resident Training License (“RTL”);² and

¹ Both the USMLE and COMLEX-USA tests have 3 parts. The USMLE refers to the parts as “Steps” and the COMLEX-USA refers to the parts as “Levels.”

² Step/Level 1 is usually taken at the end of the second year of medical school. Step/Level 2 is divided into two parts for both the USMLE (Clinical Skills or “CS” and Clinical Knowledge or “CK”) and the COMLEX-USA (Cognitive Evaluation or “CE” and Performance Evaluation or “PE”) and is usually taken in the third or fourth year of medical school. Step/Level 3 is usually taken after the first year of residency.

WHEREAS, continued enforcement of this requirement could prevent otherwise qualified resident physicians from beginning their training in 2020 on a timely basis; and

WHEREAS, NCMB has been in discussions with representatives at North Carolina Graduate Medical Education (“GME”) institutions about this subject; and

WHEREAS, several North Carolina GME institutions have requested that the NCMB postpone both parts of the USMLE and COMLEX–USA Step/Level 2 requirement for the issuance of an RTL; and

WHEREAS, doing so will allow RTL applicants who have otherwise completed the requirements to graduate from medical school and who have been accepted into a North Carolina residency training program to start their residency, which will assist in battling COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, the NCMB has authority under N.C. Gen. Stat. § 90-12.5 to take this action in order to permit the provision of emergency health services to the public; and

WHEREAS, a Special Meeting of the NCMB was conducted on March 27, 2020, and this subject was discussed at length; and

WHEREAS, the NCMB voted on March 27, 2020, to take this action for the benefit and protection of the people of North Carolina and the United States of America.

NOW, THEREFORE, it is **ORDERED** that:

The NCMB shall postpone both parts of the USMLE and COMLEX–USA Step/Level 2 requirement for RTL applicants subject to the following conditions:

1. This postponement shall be in effect until the NCMB’s Chief Executive Officer has determined that it is reasonable to discontinue the postponement.
2. This postponement shall not apply to any RTL applicant who has taken and failed either part of Step/Level 2 twice.
3. All RTL applicants receiving an RTL during the postponement period must meet all other requirements for an RTL.
4. A list of every RTL issued via this process shall be maintained by NCMB staff to ensure that these RTL applicants eventually satisfy both parts of the USMLE and COMLEX–USA Step/Level 2 requirement once testing has resumed as determined by NCMB Executive staff.

