

Program Requirements around Passage of USMLE Step 2CK and USMLE Step 2CS

Results from a Survey Administered in July 2012

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August 2012

Many factors impact applicant behavior and how they approach the residency application process. As they begin the research phase, applicants seek out as much information as possible to aid them in their decision-making. Some information is data-driven and is available from a variety of sources like their medical school; the Careers in Medicine application; and articles written about various aspects of the residency selection process in academic journals. Other data are collected from the experiences of upperclassmen, mentors and others perceived to be “in the know” within the medical school community. Applicants also conduct research on individual programs, using whatever they can locate on program web sites and sources like ERAS, the ACGME site, the specialty web sites, and the American Medical Association’s FREIDA tool to identify information about the training programs and their requirements.

As another residency application cycle gets underway, speculation about program requirements has fueled rumors and anxiety surrounding program requirements as they relate to USMLE exams. Anecdotal evidence suggests that residency programs, in increasing number, are requiring applicants who apply to their programs not only take, but pass, USMLE Step 2CK, before they are granted an interview. While only circumstantial in nature; it is generating questions and concern within the community; and have generated calls for accurate information to help inform decisions being made by advisors as well as the applicants they support. The purpose of this paper is to share the results of a short survey distributed to ERAS 2012 program contacts within a two week period in July 2012 regarding programs’ practices and requirements relating to Board scores for US medical graduates (USMGs).

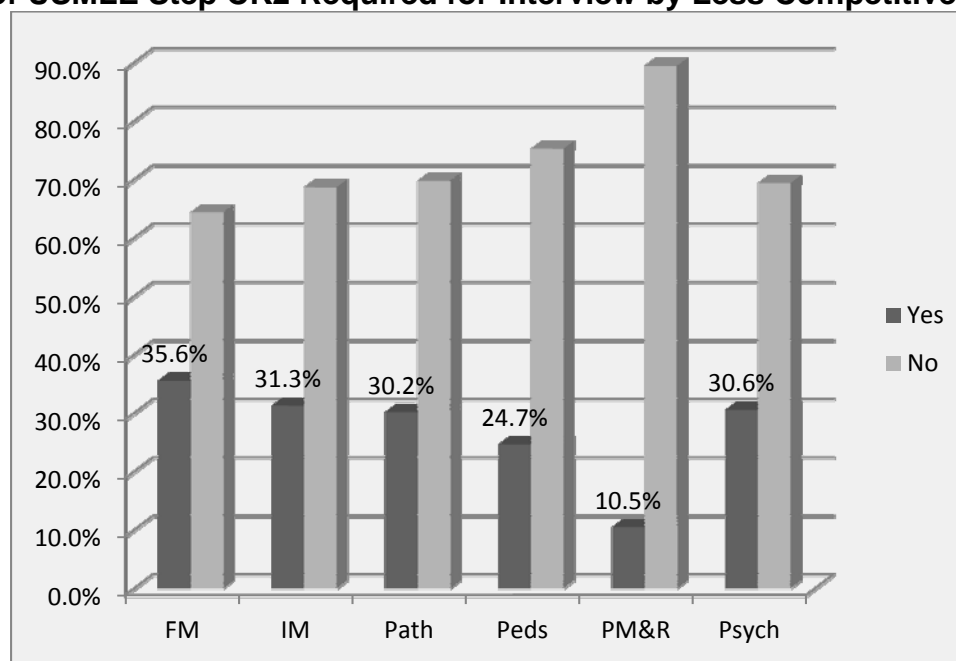
A link to the survey (See Appendix A) was transmitted to 3,793 ERAS-participating residency programs in 45 residency specialties on July 9, 2012 using the Survey Monkey[®] tool. Programs were given until July 20, 2012 to complete the survey. One reminder e-mail was sent to non-responsive programs to encourage completion of the survey. A list of all specialties and their response rate is highlighted in Appendix B. Although combined specialties were invited to participate in the survey, this report focuses on responses provided by the core specialties only, as depicted in Appendix C. The response rate for the core specialties was 35.4%, ranging from a low of 27.4% (PM&R) to the highest response rate of 50.5% (Radiology). In order to contextualize the data, the specialties’ responses were grouped by perceived competitiveness, using the mean number of applications submitted by USMGs during the ERAS 2012 season:

Program Requirement around Passage of USMLE Steps 2CK and 2CS

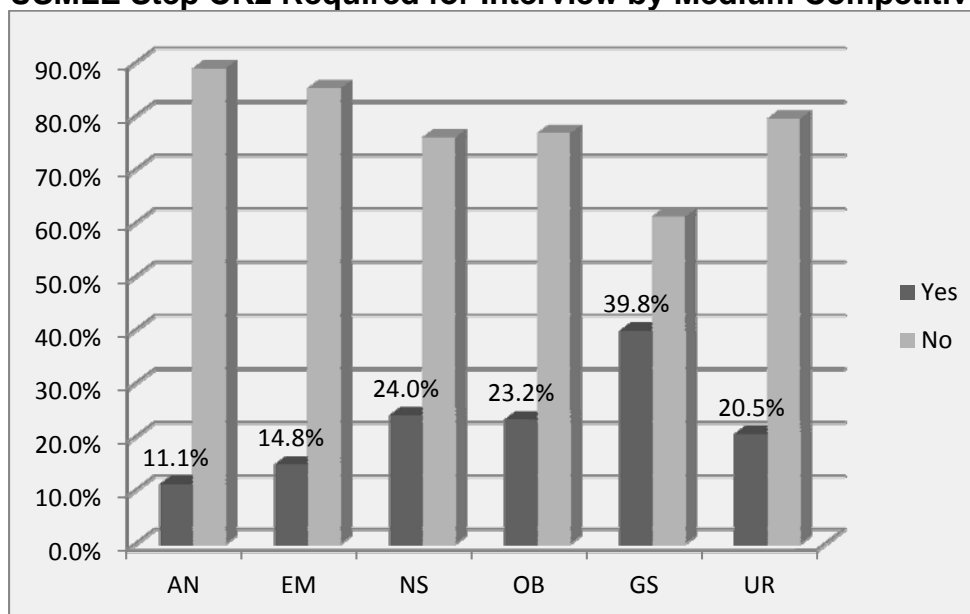
Less Competitive Specialties < 30 Applications	Medium Competitive Specialties 30-49 Applications	Most Competitive Specialties >50 Applications
Family Medicine (16.5 apps)	Anesthesiology (34.2 apps)	Dermatology (63.5 apps)
Internal Medicine (22 apps)	Emergency Medicine (32.7 apps)	Orthopedic Surgery (59.1 apps)
Pathology (22.4 apps)	Neurological Surgery (46.9 apps)	Otolaryngology (50.5 apps)
Pediatrics (21.9 apps)	Obstetrics/Gynecology (31.7 apps)	Radiation Oncology (53.2 apps)
PM &R (22.7 apps)	Surgery-General (30.6 apps)	Radiology (50.4 apps)
Psychiatry (22.7 apps)	Urology (48.4 apps)	

Residency programs were asked, **“Do you require USMG applicants to pass USMLE Step 2CK before granting an interview?”** The results arising from this question are depicted graphically below. The percentages correspond to the “Yes” responses for each specialty:

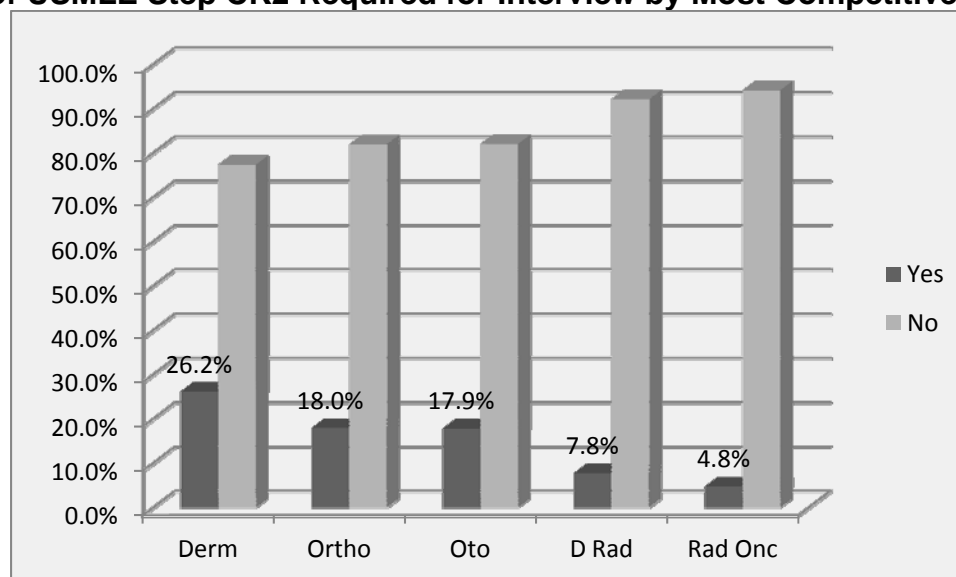
Passage of USMLE Step CK2 Required for Interview by Less Competitive Specialties



Passage of USMLE Step CK2 Required for Interview by Medium Competitive Specialties



Passage of USMLE Step CK2 Required for Interview by Most Competitive Specialties



Overall, the results comport with the common thinking among medical school staff, as expressed on the GSA Listserv in July. While there are some programs in each of the specialties that required passage of the USMLE Step 2CK in order to be granted an interview, the proportion of programs within the specialty requiring passage is clearly in the minority. As a group, the less competitive specialties recorded higher percentages requiring passage for an interview than the medium and highly competitive

specialties. Clear outliers for the medium competitive specialties with affirmative responses approaching 40% were General Surgery (39.8%) and Dermatology (26.2%) for the highly competitive specialties.

The data highlight the differences in approach programs within a specialty take with regard to what qualifies one for an interview at a program. Of the programs responding, roughly 10 – 39% of programs within a specialty indicated that they require applicants to take and pass the USMLE CK2 before granting an interview. There also appears to be an inverse relationship between the level of competitiveness of a specialty and the percentage that require passage of the exam. Less competitive specialties tend to have a higher proportion of programs requiring passage, whereas the most competitive specialties required passage less often. This could be attributable to the fact that applicants who tend to have done well on Step 1 generally apply to the most competitive specialties, so program surmise that if applicants did extremely well on Step 1, it seems logical that they will perform equally well on Step 2CK.

A follow-up question was asked of those programs that indicated that they required passage of Step 2CK. They were asked whether there were circumstances under which they would consider granting an interview to an applicant who had not yet taken the exam. Although it is reassuring to note that about half the programs answered yes to this question, it also further highlights the difficulty in nailing down programs on their application requirements, and further suggests that many program staff see selecting residents as more of an art than science. Programs are flexible and many take the opportunity to locate diamonds in the rough ... or applicants with other credentials that may be of interest to the program. Popular reasons programs cited across most specialties for granting an interview even though the applicant had not yet taken and passed Step 2CK included:

- Applicant had performed well on Step 1
- Applicant was known to the program (either from their own medical school, or had completed an internship at the program; or if known to faculty or PD); or
- The candidate had significant research experience or was enrolled in a master's program during medical school; or
- The application was otherwise excellent and USMLE results would be available prior to ranking

Other interesting comments from programs included:

- Flexibility ... decision is made on a case-by-case basis
- Overall, the candidate appears to be a good fit, has really strong credentials and the Step 1 score is over the required minimum
- If the exam has been taken and results are pending
- If everything looks good and the applicant is a US graduate
- Only if the applicant is scheduled to take Step 2 prior to the interview
- Depends on the quality of the applicant pool
- Program Director's discretion

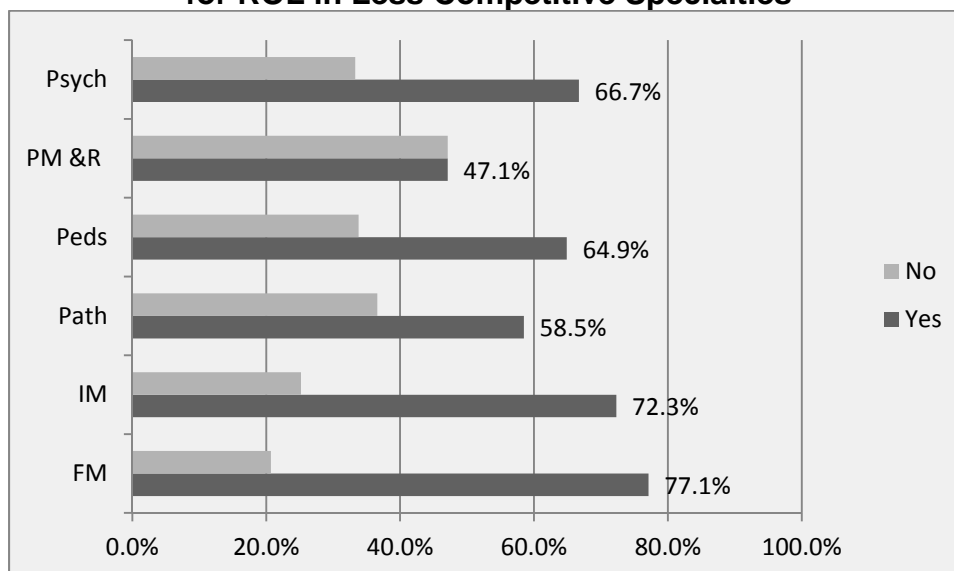
The survey results reveal that while the program's written requirements are important for applicants to consider, and heed in most cases, if the applicant has an excellent academic record, including doing well on the USMLE Step 1 exam; but has not taken the Step 2CK, a follow-up call to the program expressing interest could produce an interview invitation. On the other hand, as a general rule, applicants who may

have faltered on the Step 1 exam or who may have other blemishes on their academic record should plan to take Step 2CK early to improve their chances of getting interviews at desired programs.

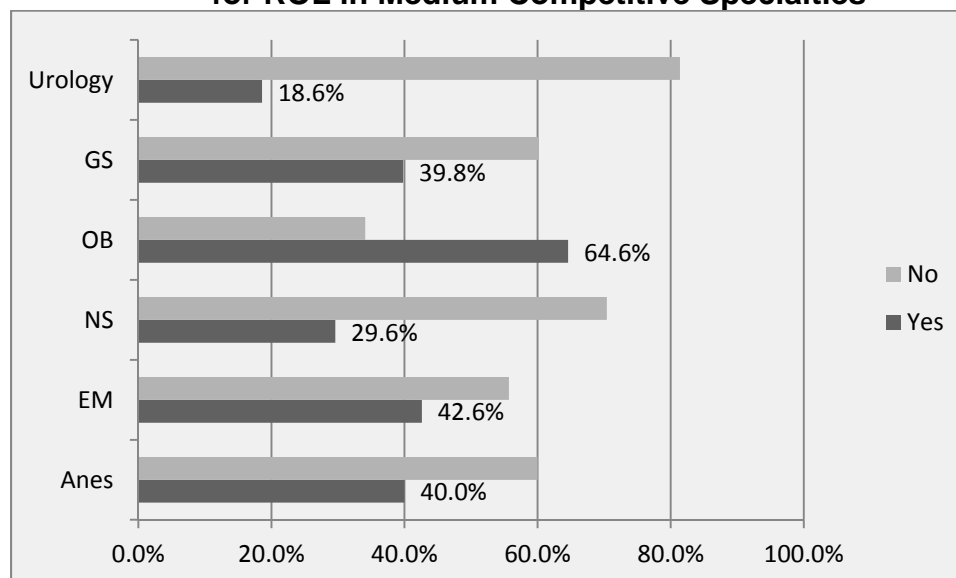
Do you require USMG applicants to pass USMLE Step 2CK before placement on your ROL?

When programs were asked whether they required USMG applicants to pass USMLE Step 2CK before placing them on their ROL, the less competitive specialties responded in the affirmative between 47-77%. Medium competitive specialties had the most variability in their requirements, ranging from 18-64% responding that they required passage of USMLE 2CK before placing applicants on their ROL. The most competitive specialties had the lowest percentage of programs responding that they required passage of USMLE 2CK prior to placement on the ROL, between 13-26%

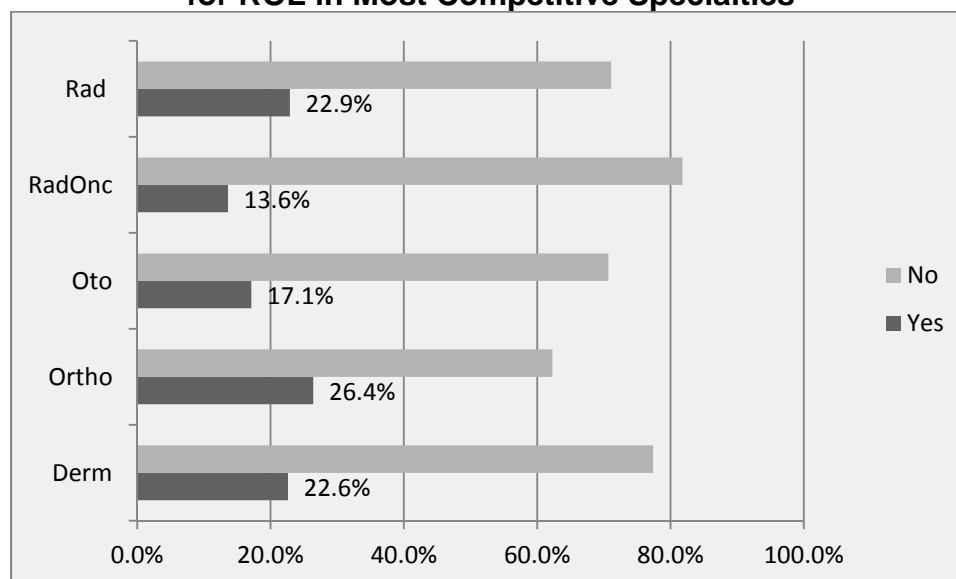
**Percentage of Programs Requiring Passage of USMLE 2CK
for ROL in Less Competitive Specialties**



Percentage of Programs Requiring Passage of USMLE 2CK for ROL in Medium Competitive Specialties



Percentage of Programs Requiring Passage of USMLE 2CK for ROL in Most Competitive Specialties

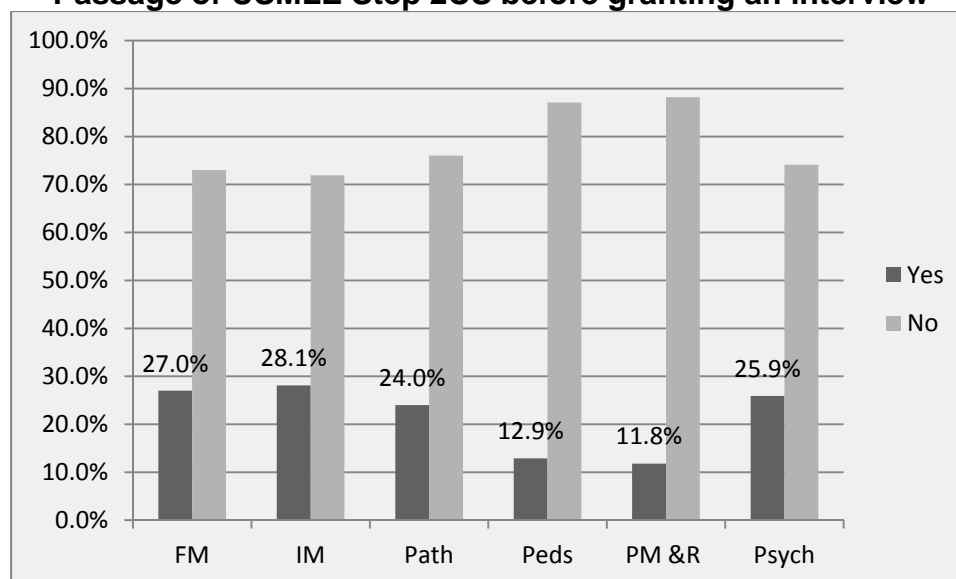


As with the selection for interview, it appears that the most competitive specialties are less likely to require passage of Step 2CK for ROL than other specialties. The less competitive specialties are more likely to require passage of the 2CK for placement on the ROL, particularly more than 70% of the Family Medicine and Internal Medicine programs responding to this survey answered yes.

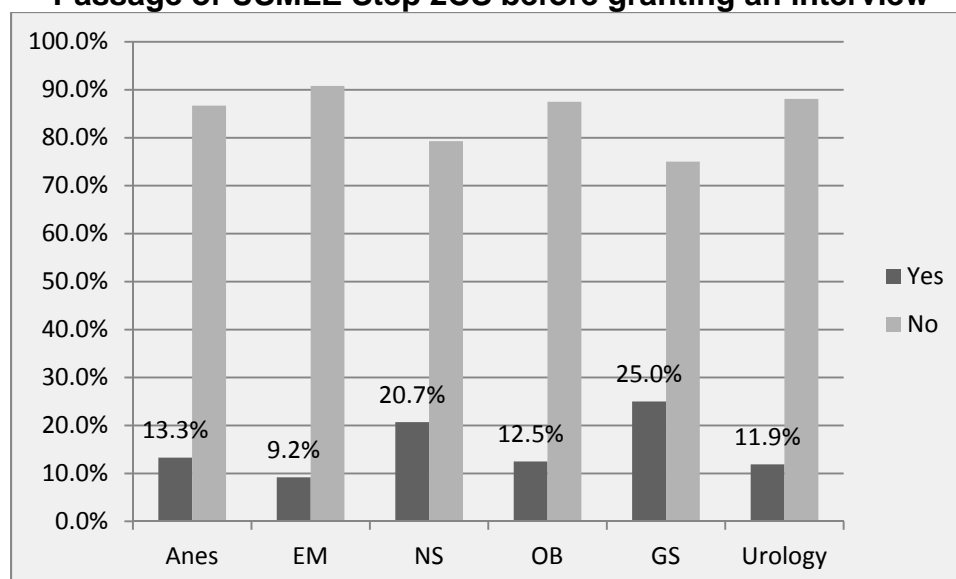
Do you require USMG applicants to pass USMLE Step 2CS before granting an interview?

While some of the circumstantial evidence about programs requiring passage of USMLE Step CK does have a bit of truth to it, the results for Step 2CS is less clear. Not many programs require passage for interview or ROL.

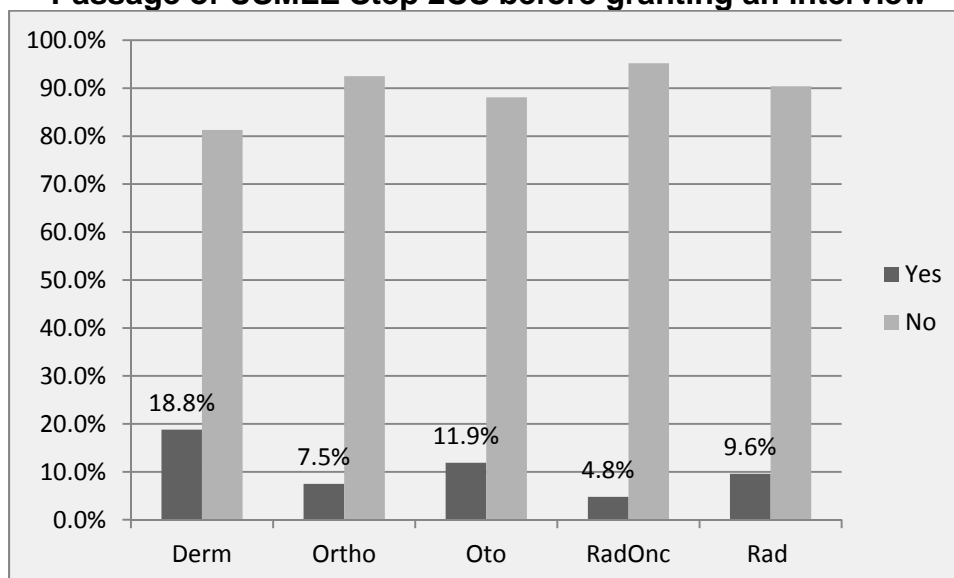
Percentage of Programs in Less Competitive Specialties Requiring Passage of USMLE Step 2CS before granting an interview



Percentage of Programs in Medium Competitive Specialties Requiring Passage of USMLE Step 2CS before granting an interview



Percentage of Programs in Most Competitive Specialties Requiring Passage of USMLE Step 2CS before granting an interview



Besides their own web sites and FREIDA, where do programs provide information about requirements?

Interestingly, programs provide information to applicants in the following ways:

- Information Sheet provided upon request
- Minimum Requirement Letter/E-mail sent to all interested applicants
- Verbally
- During interview presentation or provided in interview materials
- Brochures
- Response to E-mails
- Applicant Information Phone Line/Voicemail

A few programs indicated that they didn't provide this information because all applications are reviewed and criteria are applied on a case-by case basis. A few others noted that while passage of the exams is their preference, they do not place the requirement in writing at all.

It is also worth noting that within each specialty, programs indicated that they share exam requirements either during the course of the interview day or when interviews are scheduled. Many also indicated that this information is provided when asked. Applicants should be proactive in requesting this information before applying so they can schedule their Exams to meet deadlines or determine whether they should apply to the program at all.

In summary, while the discussion on the GSA Listserv highlighted the growing concern that programs in larger numbers were requiring passage of the USMLE Step 2CK before interview invitations were extended, the results of this survey does not support this claim. While it is true that a number of programs in virtually all the specialties do in fact make this requirement, there is no indication that the numbers are on the increase. School advisors should continue to use the data at their disposal to recommend whether the applicant should take Step 2CK prior to the application season. Also, encourage applicants to contact programs directly to ascertain requirements. While the public data will provide some of the data applicants require, it may not have all of the information. A personal call or e-mail may prove illuminating to applicants seeking information to make their all-important decision about where to submit applications.

Appendix A Survey Questions

1. Please indicate your specialty.
2. Do you require USMG applicants to pass USMLE Step 2CK before granting an interview?
 - a. (If Answer to #2 is Yes) Are there circumstances under which you would consider granting an interview to an applicant who had not taken Step 2CK?
3. Do you require USMG applicants to pass USMLE Step 2CK before placement on your ROL?
4. Do you require USMG applicants to pass USMLE Step 2CS before granting an interview?
 - b. (If Answer to #4 is Yes) Are there circumstances under which you would consider granting an interview to an applicant who had not taken Step 2CS?
5. Do you require applicants to pass USMLE Step 2CS before placement on your ROL?
6. Do you provide all of this information on your program's:
 - c. Web site?
 - d. FREIDA Listing?
 - e. Other Documentation?

Appendix B

Response Rate for All Specialties Participating in the Survey

Specialty	ERAS Programs	No. Responded	Response Rate
Anesthesiology	124	45	36.29%
Child Neurology	64	11	17.19%
Dermatology	107	34	31.78%
Emergency Medicine	155	72	46.45%
EM/FM	2	0	0.00%
Family Medicine	451	196	43.46%
Family Medicine/Preventive Medicine	1	1	100.00%
Internal Medicine	394	160	40.61%
Internal Medicine/Dermatology	8	1	12.50%
Internal Medicine/Emergency Medicine	11	2	18.18%
Internal Medicine/Family Practice	2	0	0.00%
Internal Medicine/Medical Genetics	3	0	0.00%
Internal Medicine/Neurology	2	0	0.00%
Internal Medicine/Pediatrics	77	18	23.38%
Internal Medicine/Preventive Medicine	4	0	0.00%
Internal Medicine/Psychiatry	11	0	0.00%
Neurodevelopmental Disabilities	6	1	16.67%
Neurological Surgery	104	30	28.85%
Neurology	127	41	32.28%
Nuclear Medicine	14	1	7.14%
Obstetrics and Gynecology	245	94	38.37%
Orthopedic Surgery	156	59	37.82%
Otolaryngology	108	46	42.59%
Pathology-Anatomic and Clinical	141	56	39.72%
Pediatrics	198	94	47.47%
Pediatrics/Anesthesiology	4	0	0.00%
Pediatrics/Emergency Medicine	3	0	0.00%
Pediatrics/Medical Genetics	13	3	23.08%
Peds/PMR	3	3	100.00%
Peds/Psych/Child & Adolescent Psych	9	1	11.11%
Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation	73	20	27.40%
Plastic Surgery	108	2	1.85%
Plastic Surgery-Integrated	47	10	21.28%
Preventive Medicine	41	7	17.07%
Psychiatry	180	63	35.00%
Psychiatry/Family Practice	6	2	33.33%

Program Requirement around Passage of USMLE Steps 2CK and 2CS

Specialty	ERAS Programs	No. Responded	Response Rate
Psychiatry/Neurology	5	0	0.00%
Radiation Oncology	82	25	30.49%
Radiology-Diagnostic	178	90	50.56%
Surgery-General	251	96	38.25%
Thoracic Surgery-Integrated	17	5	29.41%
Transitional Year	106	21	19.81%
Urology	116	46	39.66%
Vascular Surgery-Integrated	36	5	13.89%
Total	3793	1361	35.88%

Appendix C Survey Response Rate by Core Specialty

Specialty	ERAS Programs	No. Responded	Response Rate
Anesthesiology	124	45	36.29%
Dermatology	107	34	31.78%
Emergency Medicine	155	72	46.45%
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Pediatrics	198	94	47.47%
Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation	73	20	27.40%
Psychiatry	180	63	35.00%
Radiation Oncology	82	25	30.49%
Radiology-Diagnostic	178	90	50.56%
Surgery-General	251	96	38.25%
Urology	116	46	39.66%
Total:	3190	1263	39.59%