

Is Medical School Progress Testing Truly Full Proof?

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Dear Editor

There is currently much debate around the use of progress testing in medical school, an area that is not entirely new but with a focus around the use of a possible central database available on an international scale.

The concept of a progress test for those unaware relies upon medical students, whatever level, sitting a finals exam. The aim being to test and retest principles as they progress through the years with the expected aim of progression.

I myself underwent progress testing up until my graduation in 2007. And I noted an obvious flaw. When we came to sit our first ever progress test during our third year, many students including myself thought one step ahead. If we were to sit the final exam, why not read additional content? Content that as yet had not been taught. So even though our first progress test was centred on our first clinical module

of gastroenterology and endocrinology, we knew other subjects were going to be tested. And as a PBL school with extensive self-directed learning, teaching ourselves would not be so much of an issue.

So what was the outcome? Well myself and my peers passed. And we passed each subsequent test, leading to our graduation. Yet we did not exactly progress so to speak. What resulted was flat scoring. Scores were initially higher than expected for our first attempt and remained high subsequently. So while some may argue that we conquered the assessment process, I feel that our lack of true progression was evident. The risk of sitting a final exam when not quite finalists can result in a broad gain of material yet little gain in depth, the depth that is required particularly when patients are involved. So while there may be a push towards widespread progress testing, I hope that this consideration can be taken into account before institutes blindly follow suit.

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