

Research Symposium

Evaluating Pathoma Use Among MSUCOM Students During Pre-Clinical Coursework and COMLEX-USA Level 1 Preparation

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INTRODUCTION

Osteopathic medical students frequently rely on third-party resources to supplement pre-clinical learning and prepare for COMLEX-USA Level 1. Pathoma is a widely used pathology resource, yet limited data describe how students integrate it longitudinally across coursework and licensing exam preparation.

OBJECTIVE

To characterize MSUCOM students' longitudinal perceptions and patterns of Pathoma use during pre-clinical coursework and COMLEX-USA Level 1 exam preparation.

METHODS

Second-year MSUCOM students volunteered to participate. Forty students were selected via random number generation from a pool of 98 volunteers, with representation across MSUCOM sites. Participants completed Qualtrics surveys at the end of semesters 3 through 5 assessing Pathoma use (format, frequency, time spent, targeted topics/courses, and barriers). After Level 1, participants completed a semi-structured Zoom interview with an investigator (LT) exploring Pathoma's perceived strengths and limitations, overall perceived value, comparisons with other resources, and peer influences.

RESULTS

During pre-clinical coursework, 18/30 (60%) interviewees reported rarely or never using Pathoma, whereas 28/30 (93%) reported using Pathoma during Level 1 exam preparation. In the semester 3 survey, 18/38 (48%) respondents preferred the online format whereas post COMLEX-USA Level 1, 21/30 (70%) preferred online use. Average reported coursework use was 7 hours. Of the interviewees using Pathoma, 23/28 (82%) increased average use. Students most commonly emphasized early chapters 1–3 and frequently used Pathoma alongside other resources, particularly First Aid (14/30, 47%), UWorld (9/30, 30%), and Sketchy (15/30, 50%). A commonly cited limitation was the absence of an integrated question bank. 16/30 (53%) interviewees reported increased confidence for Level 1 attributable to Pathoma, although a minority described the content as dense or less engaging. Most interviewees indicated they would recommend Pathoma to junior students.

DISCUSSION

In this longitudinal cohort, Pathoma was used infrequently during routine coursework but was commonly adopted during COMLEX-USA Level 1 preparation. Students perceived Pathoma as a quality resource for conceptual reinforcement and high-yield pathology review, especially when paired with question-based resources. These findings may inform how institutions counsel students on resource selection and better align curricular supports with learners' study behaviors.

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