

An Announcement Regarding Fraudulent Letters of Recommendation

International medical students/graduates, including Fifth Pathway participants, who participate in the Electronic Residency Application Service (ERAS®) are reminded that the submission of fraudulent letters of recommendation to ECFMG constitutes irregular behavior, as defined by ECFMG.

Allegations of irregular behavior are reviewed by the ECFMG Medical Education Credentials Committee, a standing committee of the ECFMG Board of Trustees. If the Committee determines an individual has engaged in irregular behavior:

- a **permanent** annotation will be included in his or her ECFMG Status Reports and Certification Verification Service (CVS) Reports;
- additional information explaining the basis for the finding of irregular behavior and the resulting action will accompany every ECFMG Status Report and CVS Report and may also be provided to legitimately interested entities; and
- the decision will be reported to the Federation of State Medical Boards Board Action Data Bank, state medical licensing authorities, directors of graduate medical education programs, and to any other organization or individual who, in the judgment of ECFMG, has a legitimate interest in such information.

Furthermore, ECFMG may:

- bar an individual from exams; and
- withhold or revoke a Standard ECFMG Certificate.

In recent years, the ECFMG Medical Education Credentials Committee has made a determination of irregular behavior in 12 cases based upon the submission of either altered or wholly fabricated letters of recommendation. In 11 of these cases, the applicant's Standard ECFMG Certificate was revoked. Since these individuals are no longer certified by ECFMG,

they are not eligible to participate in an accredited residency program in the United States and are not eligible to take USMLE Step 3.

In an effort to address the issue of fraudulent letters of recommendation and align the ECFMG ERAS document policies with those established for U.S. medical graduates, ECFMG requires all international medical students and graduates participating in ERAS to submit original letters of recommendation. These letters must be written on official institutional letterhead and manually signed by the letter writer in an ink color other than black. For enhanced authentication, applicants are advised to request the letter writer to affix an institutional seal to the letter of recommendation.

ECFMG makes a visual inspection of the letters when they are received to determine if they are originals or copies. If ECFMG determines that a letter of recommendation is a copy, the document will be stamped to indicate that it is a copy before it is made available to program directors. Refer to the letter of recommendation requirements on the ECFMG ERAS website for more information on this policy.

Directors of residency and fellowship programs are responsible for verifying the authenticity of letters of recommendation. In most of the recent cases reviewed by the ECFMG Medical Education Credentials Committee, the fraudulent letters of recommendation were detected by program directors attempting to verify the letters' authenticity.