



**ECFMG™**



# **Immigration Overview**

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**International Medical Graduates  
in U.S. Graduate Medical Education**

# "IMG" Definition

An **International Medical Graduate** (IMG) is any physician who received his/her basic medical degree or qualification from a medical school outside of the U.S. or Canada, regardless of citizenship

- This includes any U.S. citizen who received a medical degree from a school outside of the U.S. or Canada

# IMGs and Entry into U.S. GME

- 1. Complete ECFMG Certification**
  - Meet examination and credentialing requirements
- 2. Apply for U.S. Residency Training Position**
  - Apply to ERAS
  - Interview with programs
  - Register with the NRMP Match
  - Secure a contract/letter of offer
- 3. If Foreign National, Obtain the Appropriate Visa/Visa Status for U.S. Residency Training**

# ECFMG (1956-2006)

Private, Non-profit Organization

## Organizational Members

- American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS)
- American Medical Association (AMA)
- Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC)
- Association for Hospital Medical Education (AHME)
- Federation of State Medical Boards of the United States, Inc (FSMB)
- National Medical Association (NMA)

# ECFMG Services

- ECFMG Certification
- Certification Verification Service (CVS)
- Electronic Residency Application Service (ERAS®)
- J-1 Exchange Visitor Sponsorship Program (EVSP)

# ECFMG Certification

# ECFMG Certification

ECFMG Certification assures residency program directors and the U.S. public that the international medical graduate (IMG) has met minimum standards to enter U.S. residency programs

## **ECFMG Certification is required for:**

- IMG entry into ACGME-accredited GME
- Taking USMLE Step 3
- Unrestricted state licensure
- Visa sponsorship

# Two Components of Requirements for ECFMG Certification

ECFMG Certification Requirements Consist of:

- Medical Education Credentials
- Medical Examinations

# Medical Education Credential Requirements for ECFMG Certification

- Completion of a medical school curriculum of at least **four academic years**
- Medical school, graduation year must be listed in *International Medical Education Directory (IMED)* See <http://IMED.ecfm.org>
- Documented completion of all requirements for and receipt of **final medical diploma**
- **Primary source verification** of medical diploma and **transcript** by ECFMG

# Examination Requirements for ECFMG Certification

<i>Prior Requirements*</i>	<b>Current Requirements</b>
<b>USMLE™ Step 1 Basic Science</b>	<b>USMLE Step 1</b>
<b>USMLE Step 2 Clinical Science</b>	<b>USMLE Step 2 CK Clinical Knowledge</b>
<b>ECFMG Clinical Skills Assessment (CSA®)</b>	<b>USMLE Step 2 CS Clinical Skills</b>
<b>English language proficiency test (TOEFL®)</b>	<b>USMLE Step 2 CS has a distinct, separately scored spoken English proficiency subcomponent</b>

\*An ECFMG Certificate may be based on previously-administered examinations.

# ECFMG Certification Resources

- General Certification Information @ <http://www.ecfm.org/cert/index.html>
- ECFMG Certification Fact Sheet @ <http://www.ecfm.org/cert/certfact.html>
- Permanent Validation Sticker
  - Form 246: <http://www.ecfm.org/cert/permvald.pdf>
  - Form 295: <http://www.ecfm.org/forms/form295.pdf>
- E-Newsletter: *The ECFMG Reporter*

# Certification Verification Service (CVS)

ECFMG's **Certification Verification Service (CVS)** provides primary source confirmation of an IMG's ECFMG certification status to residency programs, state medical boards and other organizations, such as hospitals and HMOs

- Satisfies JCAHO requirement for primary-source verification of IMG's medical school completion
- No charge for GME programs

# CVS Online

- Web-based requests for confirmation of ECFMG Certification status
- Confirmations sent via postal mail
- Establish an account for your program by sending e-mail to [cvsonline@ecfm.org](mailto:cvsonline@ecfm.org)
- <http://www.ecfm.org/cvs>

# Applying for a U.S. Residency Training Position

# Electronic Residency Application Service (ERAS)

- Developed by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) to facilitate applications to residency/fellowship programs
- ECFMG serves as the dean's office for all IMGs and transmits supporting documents to program directors through the Internet (letters of recommendation, MSPEs, transcripts, etc.)

# Securing a GME Contract

## Standard Timeline

- Review residency applications – *ERAS*
- Interview (U.S. or conference call) – *Fall*
- Resident selection (Pre-match contract offers or rank order for the NRMP/"Match") – *February*
- Match results – *Mid-March*
- State Licensure – *April-June*
- Orientation/Training Start – *June-July 1*

# Obtain the Appropriate Visa / Visa Status for U.S. Residency Training

# Who Needs a Visa?

All **foreign national** physicians need appropriate visas to participate in U.S. graduate medical education (GME)

*Foreign nationals* = individuals who are not U.S. citizens or permanent residents

- A foreign national physician may be a U.S. medical school graduate or an IMG
- All IMGs, regardless of citizenship, must be ECFMG Certified to enter U.S. GME, but not all IMGs need visas

# Immigration Terms

- **“Visa”** - A permit granted for entry into the U.S., stamped or affixed in the passport; expiration date applies to timetable for entry only, can expire once in the U.S.
- **U.S. Consulate** – Branch of U.S. Embassy, located outside the U.S., operates under the U.S. Department of State; responsible for visa issuance (personal interview, security clearances, issuing visa stamp, etc.)

# Immigration Terms

- **“Visa Status”** – Immigration classification that reflects the authorized activity and timeframe for U.S. stay (i.e. “B-1 status” for tourist/visitor, “J-1 status” for exchange visitor physician, “H-1B status” for specialty worker/physician); authorized stay may be limited to specific date or issued for “duration of stay” while participating in the approved activity
- **U.S. Customs and Border Protection – (USCBP)** Agency of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), responsible for confirming the “visa status” of foreign nationals entering/departing U.S. ports-of-entry

# Immigration Terms

- **“U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services (USCIS)”**
  - Formerly “I.N.S.”, agency of DHS, primarily operates in field offices in the U.S.; responsible for processing immigrant and non-immigrant benefit petitions, including “change of visa status” (i.e., B-1 tourist/visitor to J-1 or H-1B physician)

# Visas Options

## for Foreign National Physicians in GME

- **J-1 “Alien Physician”** (ECFMG sponsored)
- **H1-B “Specialty Occupation Worker”**
- **J-2 “Dependent”** (Spouse of J-1 principal)
- **F-1 “Student”** (1 year Optional Practical Training)
- **O-1 of “Extraordinary Merit”** (International Renown)
- **Other – Employment Authorization Document (EAD)**

# Visa Considerations

Which visa is the most appropriate for the foreign national physician training in your program ?

- Institutional policies
- Employer responsibilities/liabilities
- Administration - centralized/decentralized
- Program recruitment strategy
- Exceptional circumstances
- Budget/fees
- Attorney selection
- IMG's current/past immigration history
- IMG's goals/plans/family

# Most Common Visa Types for IMGs

	<b>H-1</b>	<b>J-1</b>
<b>Regulatory Oversight</b>	Departments of Labor & Homeland Security	Departments of State & Homeland Security, ECFMG
<b>Examinations</b>	USMLE Steps 1, 2CK, 2CS, 3	USMLE Steps 1, 2CK, 2CS
<b>Time Limit</b>	6 years maximum	7 years maximum
<b>Funding</b>	U.S. employer salary only	Multiple sources acceptable
<b>212(e)&amp; 214(b)</b>	No	Yes
<b>EAD for Spouse</b>	No, no work permit for H-4	Yes, J-2 can apply for work
<b>Processing Time/Fees</b>	From \$ 1,500 - \$6,000+ (attorneys, family, etc.)	\$300 (ECFMG+SEVIS)

# J-1 Exchange Visitor Visa

*Alien Physician CFR§62.27*

- Temporary, non-immigrant classification
- Requires evidence of strong ties to the home country and intent to return - *INA §214(b)*
- Full-time participation in an approved clinical GME *training* program – *not employment*
- Duration limited to 7 years progressive training
- Automatically subject to 2 year home rule - *INA §212(e)*
- Tracked in **SEVIS** (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System)

# What is "SEVIS"

## Student and Exchange Visitor Information System

- Data exchange with DHS/DOS
- Tracks immigration activities of all non-immigrant students and exchange visitors (J, F, and M visa holders and dependents)
- Accessed by Consulates, Embassies, ports-of-entry and other DHS agencies
- ECFMG creates and updates SEVIS records for J-1 "alien physicians", issues Form DS-2019

# Non Immigrant Intent

## *INA §214(e)*

- J-1/J-2 must demonstrate sufficient ties to one's home country and intent to return by evidencing such intent (family, past and future employment, property, etc.)
- U.S. Consular official has considerable discretion in determining whether the J-1/J-2 applicant satisfies this requirement

# Two-year Home Residency Requirement

## *INA §212(e)*

- Upon completion of training, J-1 physicians are obligated to reside in their home country for at least two years before being eligible for certain changes or adjustments in U.S. visa status (H-1, green card)
- **212(e) Waiver** – Legal options exist for J-1 physicians to remain in the U.S. after training, the most common of which is employment in a medically underserved area (MUA) or Health Professions Shortage Area (HPSA)

# H-1B Visa

- Temporary worker in a specialty occupation
- Six year maximum
- Sponsored and salaried by employer
- Employer must submit a Labor Condition Application (LCA) to U.S. Department of Labor and H-1B Petition to USCIS
- Employer is responsible for certain fees (initial filing, anti-fraud, etc.); some fees may be paid in part by the foreign national
- Eligible to apply for permanent resident status

# Immigration Steps

1. Determine most appropriate visa classification for physician and program
2. Program applies for visa documentation from either ECFMG for J-1 or USCIS/DOL for H-1B
3. Physician applies for a “visa” at a U.S. Consulate abroad
  - ✓ Requires a personal interview and security clearance

# Immigration Steps

4. Physician travels to the U.S., "visa status" is granted at the port-of- entry (J-1 or H-1B Status)
  - ✓ If in U.S. in alternate "visa status," physician applies for a change of status through USCIS (i.e., B-1 to J-1)
5. Physician reports to program with I-94 Arrival Record confirming valid "visa status" (J-1 or H-1B Status)
6. For J-1s, program reports physician's arrival to ECFMG, ECFMG validates physician's SEVIS record

# Immigration Steps

7. Ten days after entering the U.S., physician may apply for a Social Security Number
8. Physician begins residency training in approved program
9. Program reports any change of program plan to ECFMG or DOL/USCIS, as required
10. Program and physician share responsibilities to maintain valid status (renew on time, comply with immigration laws, etc.)

# Common Questions

- Can a physician begin to train once ECFMG approves J-1 sponsorship and issues the Form DS-2019?
- Does the visa need to be renewed annually?
- How often does J-1 sponsorship or H-1B petition need to be renewed?
- Can a physician travel abroad while in training?
- Can a J-1 physician convert to H-1B after passing USMLE Step 3?

# EVSP Resources Review

- **EVSP Homepage** @ <http://www.ecfm.org/evsp/index.html> for access to:
  - *EVSP Reference Guide*
  - *EVSP Fact Sheet*
  - Application Materials
  - Updates and Memoranda
- **U.S. Department of State Exchange Visitor Program** @ <http://exchanges.state.gov/education/jexchanges>
- **U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services** @ [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov)
- **U.S. Department of Homeland Security** @ [www.dhs.gov/dhspublic](http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic)

# Questions?

Exchange Visitor Sponsorship Program

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