



Medical schools outside the United States and Canada vary in educational standards, curricula, and evaluation methods. The Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG), through its program of certification, assesses whether physicians graduating from these schools are ready to enter programs of graduate medical education in the United States.

This Fact Sheet is intended to provide international medical school students and graduates (IMGs) interested in graduate medical education in the United States with basic information on ECFMG Certification, as well as next steps and additional resources for those who are ready to begin the certification process.

The definitive resource on ECFMG Certification is the *ECFMG Information Booklet*. The definitive resource on the United States Medical Licensing Examination® (USMLE®) is the *USMLE Bulletin of Information*. Before applying for examination, you must read the applicable editions of these publications. In the event that information in this Fact Sheet differs from the corresponding information in the *ECFMG Information Booklet/USMLE Bulletin of Information*, the latter publications will contain the most current and accurate information.

ECFMG Certification

The purpose of ECFMG Certification is to assess whether IMGs are ready to enter U.S. residency and fellowship programs that are accredited by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME). If you wish to enter such a program, ACGME requires you to be certified by ECFMG before you can start the program. ECFMG Certification is also required before applying to take Step 3 of the USMLE. In the United States, to obtain a license to practice medicine, physicians must apply directly to the jurisdiction where they plan to practice medicine. Licensing jurisdictions in the United States require that IMGs applying for unrestricted licensure be certified by ECFMG.

Requirements for ECFMG Certification

To be eligible for certification by ECFMG, IMGs must meet the following requirements.

Medical School Requirements

The physician's medical school must meet requirements established by ECFMG. Schools that meet all requirements will be listed in the *World Directory of Medical Schools (World Directory)* with an ECFMG note stating that the school meets eligibility requirements for their students and graduates to apply to ECFMG for ECFMG Certification and examination. The ECFMG note also will include the graduation years for which the school meets these requirements. Since ECFMG is a sponsor of the *World Directory*, the ECFMG note is located on the "Sponsor Notes" tab of the medical school listing. If there is no ECFMG note on the Sponsor Notes tab of your medical school's listing, you are not eligible to apply to ECFMG for ECFMG Certification and examination. To confirm that your medical school meets ECFMG's requirements, access the *World Directory* at www.wdoms.org.

Important Note: Beginning in 2024 (previously 2023), individuals will be eligible to apply for ECFMG Certification—the first step in the certification process—and take the required examinations if, at the time of application, their medical school is accredited by an accrediting agency recognized by the World Federation for Medical Education (WFME). This requirement will be in addition to the requirement that the school must be listed in the *World Directory* with an ECFMG note stating it meets ECFMG eligibility requirements. Further details regarding the 2024 Medical School Accreditation Requirement, including eligibility guidelines, are available on the ECFMG website at www.ecfm.org/accreditation. IMGs interested in ECFMG Certification should continuously monitor this website section for the latest information.

Application for ECFMG Certification

IMGs who wish to pursue ECFMG Certification must submit an Application for ECFMG Certification. The Application for ECFMG Certification consists of an on-line application and the Certification of Identification Form (Form 186) available through ECFMG's Interactive Web Applications (IWA). The Application for ECFMG Certification requires applicants to confirm their identity, contact information, and graduation from or enrollment in a medical school that is listed in the *World Directory* with an ECFMG note stating it meets eligibility requirements for its students and graduates to apply to ECFMG for ECFMG Certification and examination. See *Application for ECFMG Certification* in the *ECFMG Information Booklet*.

Examination Requirements

Medical Science Examination Requirement

To meet the medical science examination requirement for ECFMG Certification, you must pass USMLE Step 1 and Step 2 Clinical Knowledge (CK). Detailed information is available in the *USMLE Bulletin of Information* available on the USMLE website.

Clinical Skills Requirement and Communication Skills Requirement

Prior to its suspension by the USMLE program in early 2020, the former USMLE Step 2 Clinical Skills (CS) exam was the exam that satisfied the clinical skills requirement and communication skills requirement for ECFMG Certification. In response to the suspension and subsequent discontinuation of Step 2 CS by the USMLE program, ECFMG has offered Pathways to allow IMGs to meet the clinical skills requirement and the communication skills requirement for ECFMG Certification. See *Requirements for ECFMG Certification for 2022 Match* on the ECFMG website for detailed information. Applicants pursuing ECFMG Certification who plan to participate in future Matches should monitor the ECFMG website for information on future requirements.

To meet the clinical skills requirement and communication skills requirement for ECFMG Certification, you must:

- Complete an ECFMG Pathway, which includes attaining a satisfactory score on the Occupational English Test (OET) Medicine, **OR**
- Have a passing performance on the former Step 2 CS component of USMLE that is valid for ECFMG Certification.

ECFMG has established time limits and other rules for completing the examinations required for ECFMG Certification. Refer to the ECFMG website and the *ECFMG Information Booklet* for information on time limits, exam eligibility, fees, application, scheduling, test centers, and practice materials.

Medical Education Credential Requirements

The physician's graduation year must be included in the ECFMG note in the medical school's *World Directory* listing. See *Medical School Requirements* above. IMGs must have been awarded credit for at least four credit years (academic years for which credit has been given toward completion of the medical curriculum) by a medical school that is listed in the *World Directory* with an ECFMG note stating it meets ECFMG eligibility requirements. There are restrictions on credits transferred to the medical school that awards an applicant's medical degree that can be used to meet this requirement.

Applicants must document the completion of all requirements for, and receipt of, the final medical diploma. See the *Reference Guide for Medical Education Credentials* on the ECFMG website for the exact title of the final medical diploma you must have earned (and must provide). ECFMG verifies every applicant's medical school diploma with the appropriate officials of the medical school that issued the diploma and requests that the medical school provide the final medical school transcript. Verification by ECFMG with the issuing school may also be required for transcripts that are submitted to document transferred credits. For more information, see *Medical Education Credentials* in the *ECFMG Information Booklet*.

ECFMG issues the Standard ECFMG Certificate to applicants who meet all of the requirements for certification.

The Certification Process

You should begin by first confirming that your medical school meets ECFMG requirements. Once you have confirmed that students/graduates of your medical school are eligible to apply to ECFMG for ECFMG Certification and examination, you can apply for a USMLE/ECFMG Identification Number. Once you obtain this number, you can use it to complete the Application for ECFMG Certification. Once ECFMG accepts your Application for ECFMG

Certification, including your notarized Certification of Identification Form (Form 186), you may apply for USMLE.

Before applying for USMLE, you must also read the applicable editions (those that pertain to the eligibility period in which you take the exam) of the ECFMG *Information Booklet* and the USMLE *Bulletin of Information* and ensure you meet the exam eligibility requirements. Both publications are available in the Resources section of the ECFMG website at www.ecfm.org.

Both medical school students and graduates can begin the certification process. However, since one of the requirements for ECFMG Certification is verification of your final medical diploma with your medical school, you cannot complete the certification process until you graduate and receive the diploma.

There is no time limit for completing the certification process. However, there are specific time requirements for completing the exams for ECFMG Certification and medical licensure. These requirements are described in the ECFMG *Information Booklet* and USMLE *Bulletin of Information*, respectively.

The academic year for U.S. graduate medical education programs typically begins in July. You must be certified by ECFMG before your program's start date, although you can apply to programs before becoming certified. In planning the timing of your exam application and scheduling, you should also consider deadlines imposed by the programs to which you plan to apply and the National Resident Matching Program® (NRMP®). See Applying to Graduate Medical Education Programs below.

Applying to Graduate Medical Education Programs

Basic information about all ACGME-accredited programs is available on the ACGME website at www.acgme.org. FREIDA™, published by the American Medical Association (AMA), provides access to information on more than 11,000 residency and fellowship programs. You can access FREIDA on the AMA website at www.ama-assn.org/go/freida. Application deadlines vary among programs. You should contact programs directly for information on their deadlines. Most programs require applicants to submit their applications using the Electronic Residency Application Service® (ERAS®), which was developed by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC). ECFMG coordinates the ERAS application process for IMGs. ERAS information for IMGs is available at www.ecfm.org/eras. Programs that do not participate in ERAS require applicants to use paper application materials. You should contact programs directly for their requirements.

NRMP, also known as “the Match,” matches applicants with available residency positions in the programs to which they have applied. If you wish to participate, you must register with the NRMP. Refer to the NRMP website at www.nrmp.org for requirements and deadlines, as well as information on the numbers of IMGs who have obtained residency positions through the Match in recent years.

Obtaining a Visa

IMGs who are neither citizens nor lawful permanent residents of the United States must obtain an appropriate visa to participate in U.S. graduate medical education programs. A common visa employed for this purpose is the J-1 visa. ECFMG is authorized by the U.S. Department of State to sponsor foreign national physicians for the J-1 visa. All initial applicants for ECFMG J-1 sponsorship are advised that sponsorship eligibility should not be presumed and cannot be determined until a complete review of an individual's U.S. visa history has been conducted. More information on eligibility and deadlines is available from ECFMG's Exchange Visitor Sponsorship Program at www.ecfm.org/evsp.

Additional information is available from the U.S. Department of State Exchange Visitor Program website at <http://j1visa.state.gov>. General information on the entry of foreign nationals to the United States is available from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services at www.uscis.gov and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security at www.dhs.gov.

Resources

ECFMG Certification

Visit the ECFMG website at www.ecfm.org for access to important updates, application materials, and publications, including:

- ECFMG *Information Booklet*
- *Reference Guide for Medical Education Credentials*
- USMLE *Bulletin of Information*
- *World Directory of Medical Schools*
- Interactive Web Applications (IWA)
- *The ECFMG® Reporter* – ECFMG's free e-mail newsletter for IMGs interested in ECFMG Certification.

Subscribe at www.ecfm.org/reporter.

Applying to Graduate Medical Education Programs

- Accredited Programs and Sponsoring Institutions – www.acgme.org
- FREIDA , the AMA Residency and Fellowship Database® – www.ama-assn.org/go/freida
- AAMC ERAS website – www.aamc.org/students/medstudents/eras
- ERAS Support Services at ECFMG – www.ecfm.org/eras
- National Resident Matching Program – www.nrmp.org

Visas

- ECFMG Exchange Visitor Sponsorship Program – www.ecfm.org/evsp
- U.S. Department of State Exchange Visitor Program – <http://j1visa.state.gov>
- U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services – www.uscis.gov
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security – www.dhs.gov

Additional Information

ECFMG representatives are available to answer your questions by e-mail at info@ecfm.org or telephone at (215) 386-5900.

ECFMG

ECFMG is a world leader in promoting quality health care—serving physicians, members of the medical education and regulatory communities, health care consumers, and those researching issues in medical education and health workforce planning.



3624 Market Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104-2685 USA
215-386-5900
www.ecfm.org
Follow us on social media



Copyright© 2002-2004, 2007-2012, 2014-2021 by the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates. All rights reserved. The term ECFMG® is registered in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

Published November 2002
Last updated August 11, 2021