

EDUCATIONAL COMMISSION FOR FOREIGN MEDICAL GRADUATES (ECFMG)

Overview

Through its program of certification, the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG) assesses the readiness of international medical graduates to enter residency or fellowship programs in the United States that are accredited by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME). Unaccredited Fellowship programs may be acceptable.

ECFMG offers a variety of other programs and services to physicians educated abroad and other members of the international medical community. The most common type of visa sponsored by the ECFMG is a J-1, or visa that is designed for clinical training. This visa is authorized by the U.S. Department of State under Homeland Security. A J-1 visa can be issued for a total of seven years maximum for progressive training. The applicant must return to their home country at the end of this time. J-1 visas are issued one year at a time and only for training by the designated petitioner. Changes in employment of any kind require extension or a new petition.

The Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG) is a private, non-profit organization. ECFMG's organizational members are:

- American Board of Medical Specialties
- American Medical Association
- Association of American Medical Colleges
- Association of Hospital Medical Education
- Federation of State Medical Boards of the United States, Inc.
- National Medical Association

Exam applications for USMLE Step 1, Step 2 and CSA, must be certified by the applicant and an official of the applicant's medical school. Throughout the certification process, applicants are required to provide identifying information. All discrepancies in information must be resolved.

Organization

Initial requirements for certification of J-1 Visa

- a. United States Medical Licensing Exam (USMLE) (I, II)
- b. Valid ECFMG Certificate
- c. Contract or letter of offer for a position in an accredited program of graduate medical education or training.
- d. Provide a statement of need from the Ministry of Health of _____ in home country.
- e. All other required documents (i.e. forms available on the ECFMG web site for J-1 visas).

The ECFMG tracks the status of J-1 physicians after entry to a U.S. training program. These physicians are required to renew their sponsorship with the ECFMG annually. The ECFMG communicates all sponsorship information to the Office of homeland Security. The ECFMG serves as a sponsor to both the J-1 physician and the training program.

Web sites:

ECFMG www.ecfm.org

US. Dept. of State www.state.gov.

US. Dept. of Justice
Immigration and
Naturalization Service www.ins.gov

Suggested Coordinator's Role

The most important thing for the program coordinator to remember is not to "hurry." Of course, all IMGs are anxious to come to the U.S. and begin a training program and some are so anxious that they may seem intimidating. Just remember that you are dealing with Foreign Agencies, United States Agencies, State Agencies and Institutional Agencies. A check list of things to do is invaluable.

1. Ask the applicant to bring or send the following:
 - a. ECFMG Certificate
 - b. Letters of recommendation
 - c. USMLE exam copies
 - d. Curriculum Vitae
 - e. Copy of Passport (foreign and US)
 - f. Work history
 - g. Translation of all documents (certificates, etc.)
 - h. Transcripts
 - i. Personal statement
2. If possible, ask to interview the applicant. Inform the applicant as to what will be needed if they do not have an ECFMG certificate. Get an email address, home address and a telephone number, if possible, for communication.
3. Inform the applicant as to having all documents in their notarized translations.
4. Most State Medical Boards require a background check.
5. ECFMG requires ORIGINAL documents.
6. Give or send application forms (and any Institutional forms).
7. It is necessary for applicant to understand there are deadlines to be met and that it is extremely necessary for them to communicate only with you as coordinator.

If your Institution has an International Office, communicate with them and supply all paperwork necessary for the visa. Otherwise, communicate directly with the ECFMG. When everything is in order, the ECFMG will issue a form I-797B. This form is sent to the applicant who must arrange for an interview with the American Consulate in their home country for approval. Only then can the applicant book passage to the US. It generally takes 4 to 6 months to obtain a J-1 visa after all data is submitted to the ECFMG.

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