

Medical Study in the US



APPLYING TO US MEDICAL SCHOOLS

In the U.S. medicine is taught only at the *graduate* level after an undergraduate university education. Medical education in the U.S. is generally four years of medical school, followed by three to seven years of residency training. After the four-year medical school curriculum and exams, the Doctor of Medicine (MD) degree is conferred. Many US medical schools encourage international applicants to enroll for at least one year of undergraduate coursework at an American university before starting the MD program.

Acceptance Rates at US Medical Schools: Admission to U.S. medical schools is extremely competitive. Many U.S. medical schools, especially at state-supported institutions, will not consider international students for admission to MD programs. The representation of foreign students in U.S. medical schools is less than 1% of all students. U.S. medical schools have a primary obligation to train U.S. citizens and are strict about accepting international students into the first-year class.

Expenses and Financial Aid: Average annual cost of tuition and fees for first year medical students is approximately \$11,000 for state residents and \$25,000 for international students at a state-funded medical school, and \$30,000 at a private school. In addition, the cost of living for one academic year (nine months) ranges from \$8,000-\$15,000 depending on location in the US. Few scholarships are announced for international students to pursue medical education, and loans are generally not available from US lending institutions without a US citizen as a co-borrower. However, individuals with permanent residency in the U.S. may be eligible for federal student loan programs. It usually takes a permanent resident one year as a non-student to establish residency in a state. State residency will allow you to pay in-state tuition fees, which are lower than out-of-state and private university fees.

THE STRUCTURE OF AN MD PROGRAM

The MD degree is usually completed in four years. In general, during the first two years you will study basic medical sciences: anatomy, biochemistry, physiology, microbiology, pathology and pharmacology, as well as behavioral sciences, introductory patient interviewing and examination techniques along with an introduction to health care. In the third year, you will gain experience with patients in hospital, clinic and office settings in the fields of internal medicine, family medicine, pediatrics, obstetrics and gynecology, surgery and psychiatry. The fourth year is a mix

of required and elective courses where you will gain experience and expertise in caring for patients. Towards the end of medical school, you choose a specialty which you focus on for at least three years in a residency program after the MD program. During that period you may obtain a license to practice medicine.

ADMISSION TO THE MD PROGRAM

How to Apply: There are currently two ways to apply to U.S. medical schools. If a medical school is a member of the American Medical College Application Service (AMCAS) then you must apply through AMCAS. If a school is not a member of AMCAS then you will need to apply directly to the school.

American Medical College Admission Service (AMCAS): AMCAS (www.aamc.org) is a centralized processing service for medical school applications. Most U.S. medical schools participate in AMCAS and do not accept applicants who do not. U.S. medical schools may use AMCAS for preliminary screening and outstanding applicants are asked to fill out a further medical school-specific application.

The admissions committees of U.S. medical schools where you apply will consider the following factors:

1. Undergraduate coursework and Grade Point Average (GPA)
2. Any post-baccalaureate pre-medical education
3. Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) scores – this is an 8 hour multiple choice exam required by most US medical schools. The MCAT is given twice a year and nearly all medical schools suggest taking it in the spring of the year before you want to be admitted.
4. Other factors include your personal statement, letters of recommendation, exposure to medical field and community service, interview with an admissions officer and extracurricular activities.

OBTAINING A LICENSE TO PRACTICE MEDICINE

There is no national medical licensing authority in the U.S. The license to practice medicine in the U.S. is granted by the individual medical licensing authorities in each of the 50 states, commonly known as the "state medical boards." Each board sets its own rules and regulations and individuals wishing to practice medicine in the U.S. are advised to contact the state in which they plan to work for complete information.

The United States Medical Licensure Examination (USMLE): The United States Medical Licensure Examination (www.usmle.org) is a common method of evaluation for medical licensure established by the Federation of State Medical Boards (www.fsmb.org) and the National Board of Medical Examiners (www.nbme.org) It is a single exam comprised of three steps that assess a doctor's ability to apply knowledge that is important in

medicine and that constitutes the basis of safe and effective patient care. Step 1 assesses biomedical knowledge, Step 2 assesses clinical science knowledge and Step 3 assesses the ability to apply medical knowledge of biomedical and clinical science considered necessary for the unsupervised practice of medicine.

Licensure for Foreign Medical Graduates: Your first step is to contact the state board of medicine for the state in which you plan to practice. Most states require Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG) certification of foreign medical graduates as a pre-requisite for obtaining a license to conduct supervised medical practice in that state. To conduct unsupervised medical practice, you must also complete Step 3 of the USMLE. If you are a doctor wishing to go to the US for research not involving patient care, you are *not* required to pass the USMLE.

MEDICAL RESIDENCIES/FELLOWSHIPS FOR FOREIGN MEDICAL GRADUATES

After completing the MD degree, it is standard for doctors to have a period of residency training, usually in a hospital, specializing in one area of medicine. The length of residency training varies based on the area but is usually three to seven years. Foreign medical graduates must hold a valid standard ECFMG Certificate in order to enter residency programs accredited by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (www.acgme.org).

Obtaining a Residency or Fellowship Position: At least 12 months before you wish to start a residency program, consult The *Graduate Medical Education Directory* (the "Green Book") published annually by the American Medical Association (AMA). You can also try the "FREIDA" (Fellowship and Electronic Residency Database) database on the AMA website (www.ama-assn.org) to choose an appropriate program.

National Residency Match Program (NRMP): In addition to applying directly to hospital residency programs, you may also need to register for the NRMP (www.nrmp.org). About 80% of the hospital residency programs participate in the NRMP and will not accept applications from candidates not in the NRMP. The NRMP is not a centralized application service; rather, it serves as a mechanism for matching applicants to programs in order of preference of both parties. However, applicants from foreign medical schools have to apply as independent applicants.

VISAS FOR RESIDENCIES OR TRAINING

- **J-1 Exchange Visitor Visa:** This is the visa most commonly used by foreign medical graduates for postgraduate medical education.
- **Temporary Worker H-1B:** This visa is for temporary workers in specialty occupations who hold professional level qualifications appropriate to the employment in which they will be engaged.

- **Persons of Extraordinary Ability O-1:** This visa, as applied to medicine, is usually for someone who has established an exceptional reputation in a particular field based on research or development of specialized techniques for patient care.

MEDICAL STUDENT ELECTIVES

Many medical schools worldwide now offer opportunities for students to pursue such activities as independent study, honors programs and special research projects, at home or abroad. Students wishing to obtain a position in the U.S. for their short-term elective period are not required to take the USMLE as long as the position does not involve direct patient contact.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- *Petersons U.S. and Canadian Medical Schools*
- *Best 162 Medical Schools 2005 Edition*, Princeton Review
- *Health Professions Career and Education Directory*, American Medical Association
- *Graduate Medical Education Directory*, American Medical Association

ON-LINE RESOURCES

- US Educational Advisory Service (Fulbright) information about medical education: <http://www.fulbright.co.uk/eas/studyus/subjects/medicine>.
- Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC): www.aamc.org
- Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG): www.ecfm.org
- National Board of Medical Examiners (NBME): www.nbme.org
- Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education: www.acgme.org
- American Medical Association: www.ama-assn.org

Adapted from "Medical Education in the US", US Educational Advisory Service, London.

<http://www.fulbright.co.uk/eas/studyus/subjects/medicine.html>

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