Dear Sir,

Nearly 25% of the physicians working in the United States are foreign medical graduates. Over the last 26 years, the number of International Medical Graduates (IMGs) in the United States has grown by 4,873 per year reaching a total of 215,576 in 2004. Internal medicine, anesthesiology, pediatrics, and psychiatry are the specialties with the highest number of Foreign Medical Graduates (FMGs). Dermatology, radiology, orthopedic surgery, neurosurgery and plastic surgery are the specialties considered to be extremely competitive and the odds of an IMG getting a match in these programs are extremely low. Off course, the U.S. graduates are given preference in the competitive and high ranked programs. But this doesn't mean that competitive disciplines have their doors closed for IMGs. The right credentials can help IMGs to make their ways into these specialties or high ranked facilities. According to the Neurosurgery match report 2007, out of the 170 candidates who matched, 13 were IMGs. Achieving high scores in the USMLE examinations is one of the prime factors in making an IMG application competitive for the match. Proper preparation and good guidance can make this task a lot easier. Secondly, research experience during medical school years can be a big plus point on an IMG's curriculum vitae. The important fact to emphasize here is not only to be involved in research activities, but more importantly to present and publish research work done. The more recognized and known to medical community an applicant is, the higher are the chances of getting a match at highly competitive places. Work experience in U.S. in the form of pre-doctoral electives at medical schools or hospitals, internships, observerships, or volunteer positions is always a big plus point for an IMG. Letters of recommendation from physicians that an IMG may have worked in U.S also form an important part of residency application. Obtaining advanced degrees such as MS, MPH, or a PhD or doing a Postdoctoral fellowship in U.S. after medical schooling can be a decisive factor in getting into specialties such as neurosurgery, cardiothoracic surgery, etc. or into renowned institutions such as Harvard or Johns Hopkins, etc.

Obtaining Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG) certification and a U.S visa for specialty training in the United States are the other issues which IMGs have to face. ECFMG certification requires 4 years of medical schooling at an institution recognized in the International Medical Education Directory and passing the USMLE Step I, USMLE Step II CK, and USMLE Step II CS examinations. After matching in a program in United States, the next step is obtaining a visa to train and work there. The sponsoring residency programs normally offer two types of visas: J-1 and H1 B. J-1 visa, though easier to obtain, carries with itself the restriction that the individual must return to his / her home country after completing the training. H1 B visa though involves a tedious application process, but has the advantage that it can be converted to permanent resident or green card status.

Overall, though obtaining a residency in United States is quite competitive for IMGs, but by no means impossible. Directed hard work and perseverance are the keys to achieving this goal.

REFERENCES

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Letters to the Editor

The Road to Residency in United States: Dilemma of International Medical Graduates (IMGs)