



# PHYSICIAN LICENSURE GUIDE FOR FOREIGN-TRAINED PROFESSIONALS

*New Mainers Resource Center, Portland Adult Education*



# MAINE PHYSICIAN LICENSURE GUIDE

## FOR FOREIGN-TRAINED PROFESSIONALS

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### **New Mainers Resource Center – Who We Are**

The New Mainers Resource Center (NMRC) is a program within Portland Adult Education serving area immigrants and refugees. Our offerings are designed to help New Mainers overcome barriers in order to enter the US workforce. These include: career guidance and employment case management, assistance with credential review and licensing requirements, intensive classes focused on job readiness skills, networking groups, workshops and other offerings.

### **The Purpose of this Guide**

One major challenge faced by skilled professionals, such as doctors, is the successful navigation of the complex re-licensing requirements in Maine. The purpose of this guide is to provide foreign-trained doctors the information they need to make informed decisions about their options to work in the healthcare field in Maine. This guide has been updated in October of 2020 to reflect modifications in requirements.

### **For additional information or assistance from the New Mainers Resource Center contact:**

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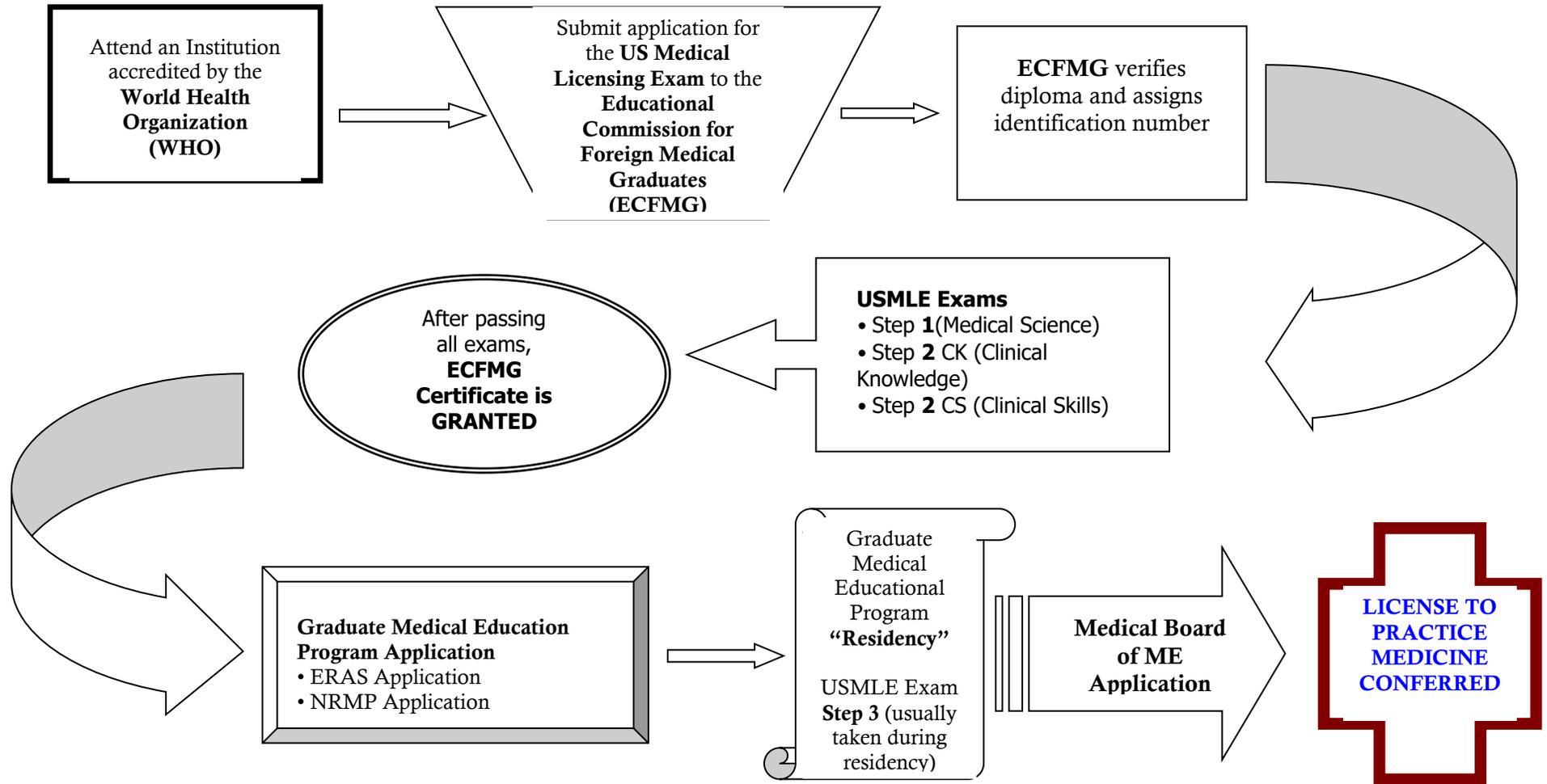
# MAINE PHYSICIAN LICENSURE GUIDE

## FOR FOREIGN-TRAINED PROFESSIONALS

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## Licensing Process for Foreign-Trained Physicians in Maine



# Licensing Process for Foreign-Trained Physicians in Maine

## Guidance for International Medical Graduates (IMGs)

The process for becoming a licensed physician in the United States is very complex, costly and competitive. There are a number of factors you must take into consideration to determine whether or not it is a process worth your pursuing. Although being licensed as a physician may not be an option for many people, as a foreign trained physician you do have a wide range of career options available to you. As you consider your options, it is important that you receive guidance and advice about costs, time commitment and your chance of success in pursuing a medical license or any of the other opportunities available to you to work in the health field.

YES TO PHYSICIAN LICENSURE IN THE US - The purpose of this guide is to make sure you are aware of all of the issues you need to consider in determining whether or not to pursue licensure as a physician in the US. If you think the answer to that question is yes, it is important that you get guidance on how best to prepare yourself. There are a number of resources provided at the end of this document regarding USMLE, ECFMG, and the other organizations that are involved in this process. Please be sure to read and make sure you understand what will be expected, and if you have questions, find someone who can help answer them for you.

NO TO PHYSICIAN LICENSURE IN THE US - If you are not interested in pursuing licensure as a physician, there is a wide range of options available for you to consider, depending on your interests, and how you answered some of the questions below. For example, if you are still very interested in a clinical practice similar to that of a physician, more long-term goals you might consider could be to be trained to work as a physician assistant or nurse practitioner. Both of these involve a significant commitment in terms of time and money for more schooling and are also very competitive training programs but are good options for foreign trained physicians.

As a physician you have lots of choices. You have had a very wide scope of practice, so taking some time to think about what you enjoyed most about being a doctor. This could help you narrow your focus in terms of additional training you may need to obtain, or what type of job to search for. If you find more training is necessary, with whatever training program you choose, it is important to be a smart consumer.

- How much will it cost? How much time will it take? How many people actually complete the program?
  - Is my English at the level it needs to be so that I can be successful in the program?
  - Do I have the financial resources to pay for the program, and if not, how will I get them?
  - What other family or financial obligations do I have?
  - What are the jobs I can get when I finish? What do those jobs pay?
- 
- Is there a demand for people to fill those jobs? For example, if I am pursuing a Master's in Public Health, what jobs can I get when I complete my degree?

# Licensing Process for Foreign-Trained Physicians in Maine

## Issues to Consider when Exploring Pursuing a US Medical License

- English proficiency – How good is your English? How long will it take you to get it to a point where you will be able to work in a health care job, study and be successful on the USMLE exams and prepare your residency applications?
- Year you graduated from medical school – not counting any advance degrees. Although it may vary some by specialty, the average number of years out of medical school for those who have been accepted into a residency program is 4.5 years.
- Immigration Status – Without permanent status or a special visa, (typically a J-1 (Exchange Visitor) or H-1B (temporary worker in a “specialty occupation”) visa), a foreign trained physician will not be eligible to apply to a residency program. Residency programs decide which visas they will accept. The timing of the visa applications can be challenging, and you will need to prove your nonimmigrant intent and show that you have strong ties to your home country and intend to return home. If you are an asylum seeker and intend to stay in the US, you are not eligible to apply for these visas. Asylum seekers will not be eligible until they are granted asylum.
- Do you have access to your transcripts and diplomas? Will you be able to have them sent from your school to ECFMG (Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates)?
- If you do not have to spend time working on your English, the process usually takes 2-3 years studying full-time for and taking the USMLE exams and applying to residency programs, and then 3-4 years in the residency, depending on your chosen specialty.
- Amount of time available to study for exams – should be prepared to study full-time for 2+ years.
- Will you be able to gain practical work or volunteer experience in a health care setting or to do job shadows and observerships and develop relationships with US physicians and health providers who would be willing to write letters of recommendation?
- Financial constraints – how will you support yourself and your family while you are studying? How will you cover the cost of applications, exams and prep resources? How will you cover the cost of applications to residency programs and travel for interviews?
- Make sure you are prepared when you take the tests - a low test score will negatively impact your competitiveness. You can't just pass the test, you need a competitive score.

# Licensing Process for Foreign-Trained Physicians in Maine

- Willingness to re-locate to attend a medical residency program – programs are very competitive. You will need to spend time researching programs across the country to determine the best fit or match for you, apply and then travel if asked to interview.
- You must be willing to consider the likelihood of not being accepted into a medical residency program after spending a significant amount of time, money and effort in attempting to pass the USMLE exams and applying for residency programs. The major influencing factors:
  - Years out of medical school -> the more years out of medical school, the less competitive you are
  - Years since last practiced -> the more years since you last practiced, the less competitive you are
  - Applicants working in some medical field prior to applying for a residency match are at an advantage

## Things to Keep in Mind About the USMLE Test Process

Preparing for the USMLE tests will take a lot of time and resources on your part. It is not just about passing the tests, you need high enough scores to be considered competitive as you apply for a residency program. A passing score on the Clinical Skills Step 1 is 192 but to be competitive you need to score 225 or above, depending on the specialty. If you fail you can re-take the test, but that bad score will still count against you. If you pass but with a low grade, you cannot take the test again for 7 years. Below is a sample timeline for how long it will take you to prepare for the USMLE tests and to apply to residency programs. As you consider how long since you graduated from medical school and when you will actually be applying to residency programs, don't forget to include these years in your calculations.

# Licensing Process for Foreign-Trained Physicians in Maine

## Timeline for preparing for USMLE Tests and Applying for Residency Programs:

- Year 1 of preparation to apply for Residency Programs
  - Study for and take USMLE Clinical Skills Step 1; passing score is 192, but a competitive score is 225
  - Gain practical knowledge in medical field including full or part-time work
  - Volunteer, job shadow /observership
  - Work on CV, letters of recommendation and personal statement
- Year 2 of preparation to apply to Residency Programs
  - Study for and take USMLE Step 2 Clinical Knowledge
  - Gain practical knowledge in medical field including full or part-time work
  - Volunteer, job shadow /observership
  - Work on CV, letters of recommendation and personal statement
- Year 3 of preparation to apply to Residency Programs
  - Jan – May – Study for and take USMLE Step 2 Clinical Skills (as soon as possible)
  - June – August – Research Residency Programs
  - Sept – October – Send in applications for residency programs
  - Nov – Dec – Interview for residency programs
- Year 4 of preparation to apply to Residency Programs
  - January – March – Take USMLE Exam 3
  - February – Submit rank order list of chosen residencies
  - March – Match Day – Residency programs pick “match” residents - In 2018, 56% of total non-US citizen International Medical Graduate participants matched or were offered a residency. The largest # of IMGs to match are in the Internal Medicine specialty
  - April – June – Move to residency location
  - July 1 – Residency begins
- How do you know if you are ready to take the USMLE Step 1 exam?
  - Several months before you plan to take the test, take a full practice test. If you are scoring in the 192 range, you are not ready. If you are scoring in the target range of 225 – 235 then you are ready.

# Licensing Process for Foreign-Trained Physicians in Maine

## Definitions and Resources

- ECFMG – Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates – Assesses whether international medical graduates are ready to enter a residency program - <https://www.ecfm.org/>
  - ECFMG Fact Card – Provides statistics on USMLE and Residency Matches - <https://www.ecfm.org/forms/factcard.pdf>
  - ECFMG Certification Fact Sheet - <https://www.ecfm.org/forms/certfact.pdf>
  - 2019 ECFMG Information Booklet - <https://www.ecfm.org/2019ib/2019ib.pdf>
- ERAS – Electronic Residency Application Service – Transmits residency applications and recommendation letters - <https://www.aamc.org/services/eras/>
- Maine Board of Licensure in Medicine – Determines requirements for Licensure in Medicine in Maine - <https://www.maine.gov/md/licensure/docs/requirements2017.pdf>
- NRMP – National Residency Matching Program – Matches medical graduates with residency programs - <http://www.nrmp.org/>
- USMLE – US Medical Licensing Exam – A 3-step process for of exams for medical licensure in the US. <https://www.usmle.org/>
  - USMLE Bulletin of Information - <https://www.usmle.org/bulletin/>
- World Health Organization – Maintains *World Directory of Medical Schools* - <https://www.wdoms.org/>

## Updates to the Physician Licensure Guide

February 2021 - The following changes have been made to the licensing processes for foreign-trained physicians in the Physician Licensing Guide. Changes were made to the United States Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE) examination process and ECFMG certification process. You should be aware that the following changes have different implementation dates.

### Change to pass/fail score reporting for Step 1

The USMLE program will change the score reporting for Step 1 from a three-digit numeric score to a pass/fail outcome. A numeric score will continue to be reported for Step 2 Clinical Knowledge (CK) and Step 3. This policy will take effect **no earlier than January 1, 2022**, with further details to follow later this year. This means that a competitive score for the important Step 1 test is no longer necessary.

Practice test programs such as Kaplan, do not yet have updated practice score ranges for this new score reporting.

### The Step 2 (CS) Clinical Skills exam has been discontinued as of January 2121

### ECFMG has changed certification requirements

In response to the discontinuation of Step 2 CS by the USMLE program, ECFMG is offering six “pathways” to allow international medical graduates to meet the clinical and communication skills requirements of certification. For example, *Pathway 1: Already Licensed to Practice Medicine in Another Country*, would satisfy the requirement if you were a practicing physician prior to coming to the US. In addition to the pathway requirement, all applicants must pass the four components of the Occupational English Test (OET) Medicine. Make sure to check in frequently with these requirements at ECFMG as they may continue to change.

<https://www.ecfm.org/certification-requirements-2022-match/#allpath>

### Change to the USMLE Attempt Limit Policy

**No earlier than January 1, 2021**, the limit on the total number of times you may take the same Step or Step Component exam will change from six to four. This includes incomplete attempts.

## COVID-19 Exam and Licensing Updates

Testing protocol and availability and licensing requirements continue to change due to COVID-19. The postponement of some exams may impact the steps in your licensure process. Make sure that you check-in with the USMLE at <https://covid.usmle.org/> and the Maine Board of Licensure in Medicine <https://www.maine.gov/md/licensure/md-license> for the latest updates.



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