

# Visa

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Foreign national physicians who seek entry into U.S. programs of graduate medical education (GME) or training must obtain an appropriate visa that permits clinical training activities. One visa commonly used by foreign national physicians is the J-1, a temporary nonimmigrant visa reserved for participants in the U.S. Department of State's Exchange Visitor Program. The Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG) is designated by the Department of State as the visa sponsor for all J-1 physicians who participate in clinical U.S. training programs. ECFMG facilitates J-1 sponsorship through the coordinated efforts of training institutions and foreign national physician applicants. ECFMG verifies that foreign national physicians meet J-1 eligibility requirements. Once secured, maintenance of J-1 status in the "physician" category requires annual application to ECFMG, through which ECFMG reevaluates a physician's continued eligibility to participate in the J-1 program. ECFMG's sponsorship for GME participation is limited to the time typically required to complete specialty/subspecialty training requirements as determined by one of the member boards of the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS). The duration of sponsorship is further limited to a maximum of seven years.

Graduates of international medical schools (IMGs) who are not permanent U.S. residents can only be accepted for resident or fellowship training on a J-1 visa and must retain their J-1 status while training at UT. An exception to this J-1 requirement will be considered in extraordinary circumstances. A program must obtain written approval from the DIO prior to ranking or offering a position to any candidate requesting a visa other than the J-1. Program requests for an exception to the J-1 visa (e.g., H1-B) must be submitted in writing to the DIO at least 30 days in advance of the match or candidate selection date. The DIO will discuss the request for an exception with the program director. The DIO and the Dean of the GSM will make the final decision about making an exception to the J-1 visa requirement.

A program matching or selecting a candidate in need of a J-1 visa must notify immediately the GSM GME Office. The GME Office will verify with the ECFMG the candidate's appointment to the GSM for training purposes.

## **J-1 Visa Validity**

- The visa in your passport is an entry only document, allowing you to enter the U.S. legally until the visa expiration date.
- Your visa will indicate the number of U.S. entries allowed until the expiration date, or will indicate unlimited, multiple entries with the letter "M".
- If your visa expires while you are in the U.S. and you do not plan to travel outside the U.S., your legal status in the U.S. is unaffected.
- Your visa is no longer valid when:
  - The VISA expiration date has passed.
  - You have used all the entries allowed.

## **J-1 Visa Renewal**

- A J-1 visa that has expired requires renewal only if you are planning to travel outside of the U.S. before the end of your residency.
- A visa that expires while traveling outside the U.S. will require renewal prior to re-entry.
  - Confirm that your visa is no longer valid before attempting to renew it. Most consulates and embassies will not renew visas that are still valid, even if the expiration date is near.
- J-1 visa renewals cannot be granted in the U.S. For an appointment and a list of documents to bring, contact the U.S. consulate or embassy where you plan to travel and

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apply for a renewal. For more information, consult the State Department's list of U.S. Consulate and Embassy Websites.

## **Guidelines for J-1 International Travel during program**

- It is strongly recommended that residents on a J-1 visa remain in the United States for the duration of their training program.
- A resident considering travel outside the U.S., must submit the *J-1 International Travel Request form* to the GME Office, at least 6 weeks prior to making travel arrangements.
- International travel requirements for J-1 residents:
  - Travel to home country, with intent to return to the U.S. requires valid passport and travel signature on the DS-2019 form. If the J-1 visa is expired, the resident must obtain a new visa before re-entry to the U.S. is granted, depending on the country, this may take several months.
  - Travel to a country abroad, other than the resident's home country, requires a valid passport and a travel signature on DS-2019 form. If the J-1 visa is expired, the resident must obtain a new visa before re-entry to the U.S. is granted, depending on the country, this may take several months. Residents should also contact the Consulate General's office or Embassy of the country that will be visited for entry requirements and procedures.
- If a resident is detained from re-entry beyond approved leave time, the DIO, after reviewing the matter with the program director, may decide that the Letter of Agreement (resident contract) is voided. If the agreement is voided, the resident must apply to the program director to be considered for re-instatement in the residency program.

Effective January 2006

Revised/Approved September 2011

Revision effective May 2014

GMDEC Revision Approved September 2020