

ECFMG'S 2023 MEDICAL SCHOOL ACCREDITATION REQUIREMENT

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SUMMARY

In the United States, where nearly one-quarter of physicians are international medical graduates (IMGs), enhancing ECFMG® Certification with a meaningful accreditation requirement advances ECFMG's core mission of promoting quality health care for the public by evaluating the qualifications of IMGs entering the U.S. health care system. With implementation of this requirement, IMGs, like graduates of U.S. and Canadian medical schools, will be evaluated both on the quality of their medical education and their individual performance. The benefits of such an accreditation system also will extend to patient populations outside of the United States, advancing ECFMG's overall mission of promoting excellence in international medical education. Recognizing that the efficacy of such a requirement is dependent upon a universally accepted accreditation process, which did not exist until recently, this requirement is not scheduled to take effect until 2023.

Key words: *accreditation, ecfmg, medical school, international medical graduate*

1 INTRODUCTION

For 60 years, ECFMG has promoted quality health care for the public by certifying IMGs for entry into U.S. graduate medical education (GME). ECFMG Certification is also required for IMGs to obtain an unrestricted license to practice medicine in the United States. ECFMG Certification has focused almost exclusively on evaluating individual graduates, not their medical schools.

After several years of discussion, the ECFMG Board of Trustees determined that it could enhance its protection of the public by incorporating medical school accreditation, using globally accepted criteria, into ECFMG's requirements for certification of IMGs. In July 2010, ECFMG determined that, effective in 2023, physicians applying for ECFMG Certification would be required to graduate from a medical school that has been appropriately accredited. This is now known as ECFMG's 2023 Accreditation Requirement.

To satisfy this requirement, an applicant's medical school must be accredited through a formal process that uses criteria comparable to those established for U.S. medical schools by the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME) or that uses other globally accepted criteria, such as those put forth by the World Federation for Medical Education (WFME).

This scope of this abstract includes:

- Overview of ECFMG Certification
- Strategic Rationale for Accreditation Requirement
- Recognition Program
- 2023 Accreditation Requirement & Implementation Plan

2 OVERVIEW OF ECFMG CERTIFICATION

2.1 Role of ECFMG Certification in the United States

ECFMG Certification is a standardized process that employs strict criteria. Since its establishment in 1956, the program has required that IMGs demonstrate successful performance on a medical science examination and document their medical education credentials, including the final medical diploma. Over the years, there have been regular enhancements to the process, including primary-source verification of the IMG’s final medical diploma with the issuing medical school in 1986, the assessment of clinical and communication skills through a new examination in 1998, the addition of the final medical school transcript as a required credential in 2004, and limits on transferred credits that can be used to meet requirements for the final medical degree in 2008.

2.2 Evolution of Medical Education Requirement

Over the past six decades, the Medical Education Requirement for students/graduates of a medical school to be eligible for ECFMG Certification, has evolved and will again with the implementation of ECFMG’s 2023 Accreditation Requirement.

Year	Credentials Required	Policy	Medical School Listing Source
1963 ↕ 1998	Diploma and License or Certificate of Full Registration	Graduates of international medical schools document the completion of all educational requirements to practice medicine in the country in which they received their medical education.	World Health Organization <i>World Directory of Medical Schools</i>
↕ 2002	Diploma		World Health Organization <i>World Directory of Medical Schools</i>
↕ 2004		For students/graduates of a medical school to be eligible to apply to ECFMG for ECFMG Certification, ECFMG must have, among other things, confirmation from the appropriate government agency in the medical school country that: (1) the medical school is recognized as a medical school by the government agency; and (2) graduates from that medical school are eligible to be licensed to practice medicine in the medical school country	<i>International Medical Education Directory (IMED)</i> maintained by FAIMER® (ECFMG’s Foundation for Advancement of International Medical Education and Research)
↕ 2015 ↕ Present	Diploma And Transcript		<i>World Directory of Medical Schools</i> maintained by FAIMER and WFME with additional vetting by ECFMG as documented in the Sponsor Notes of the school’s <i>World Directory</i> listing displaying the applicable graduation years

3 STRATEGIC RATIONALE FOR 2023 ACCREDITATION REQUIREMENT

3.1 Accreditation Systems Vary

Historically, ECFMG has relied on the above directories for assurance that there is a basic level of legitimacy of the school listed. To be listed in these directories, the medical school must be

recognized by the appropriate authority in the country in which the school is located. However, the meaning of such recognition is quite variable. For example, in some countries recognition denotes permission for an educational institution to grant a degree, while a separate regulatory body is responsible for determining the legitimacy of this credential for subsequent licensure or practice. In others, the authority to grant an M.D. or other medical degree is linked directly to the eligibility of graduates to practice. In some instances, the process of recognition involves a one-time granting of a permit to open the educational institution, and no further follow up or quality review of the school is mandated.

3.2 Explosive Growth of Medical Schools Compounds Issues

In 2010 when ECFMG announced its Accreditation Requirement, *IMED* listed 2,188 operating medical schools in 172 countries/territories. By the end of 2017, there were 2,968 in the *World Directory of Medical Schools*, a 36% increase or a 4.5% compounded average annual growth rate since 2010. This rapid expansion in the number of medical schools globally represents a challenge to those who rely on the current diverse systems of recognition and accreditation to evaluate these schools and their students/graduates. Further compounding the issue is that a few of these new non-accredited medical schools who are aggressively marketing themselves to students engage in spurious business practices; from operating in a country other than where the school was chartered to actively accepting and giving credit for failing transfer grades.

4 RECOGNITION PROGRAM

4.1 Approach & Process

After careful consideration, ECFMG concluded it is unlikely that a single entity would have the resources needed to accredit all international medical schools, and to do so in a way that would be flexible enough to provide meaningful accreditation processes while allowing appropriate variation to accommodate regional or local circumstances. A more viable model entails evaluation and “recognition,” using globally accepted criteria, of the various national and regional bodies that accredit international medical schools. This approach would create a meaningful system of international accreditation. To obtain such recognition, national or regional accrediting bodies would need to document their accreditation processes and demonstrate that these processes ensure a certain level of quality in medical education.

Quality of medical education is then assured through evaluation and accreditation of individual medical schools by recognized agencies using their demonstrated processes. Graduates of medical schools accredited by a recognized agency would meet ECFMG’s new accreditation requirement for ECFMG Certification. The following highlights the process.



4.2 Role of the World Federation for Medical Education

The World Federation for Medical Education has established standards and a program for recognition of accrediting agencies, enabling these agencies and the medical schools they accredit to achieve a new marker of quality medical education and meet the accreditation requirement for ECFMG Certification. The WFME Recognition Programme is the only one that ECFMG accepts as meeting ECFMG’s requirement for recognition of medical school accrediting agencies

4.3 Elevating Medical Education Quality

ECFMG anticipates that the 2023 Accreditation Requirement will greatly accelerate the development of international accreditation. Schools in countries where accreditation is voluntary will be motivated to achieve accreditation, if their graduates are to remain eligible for ECFMG Certification. Other agencies that accredit schools may likewise be motivated to bring their processes into line with globally accepted criteria and some countries currently without formal accreditation processes might develop them. The establishment of a unified accreditation process will create a new standard, which might be pursued by medical schools as a marker of quality and prestige regardless of whether their graduates typically pursue ECFMG Certification.

5 2023 ACCREDITATION REQUIREMENT IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

As an organization dedicated to supporting and protecting the U.S. public, we are committed to the 2023 requirement but recognize the significant impact this could have on the flow of IMGs into the U.S. physician workforce. At this time, we plan to implement this requirement in four phases.



The benefits of this phased implementation plan include promoting quality medical education through accreditation while: providing students, program directors and others with additional data to make more informed decisions; and providing flexibility in the event that the timing of each phase needs to be adjusted.

6 CONCLUSION

ECFMG's decision to require medical school accreditation as a requirement for ECFMG Certification is a significant step in its continuing efforts to enhance protection of the public. This requirement has encouraged the development of a formal process that utilizes globally accepted criteria and will catalyze efforts to accredit medical education internationally. This meaningful international accreditation system will have the effect of harmonizing accreditation standards that will improve the quality of medical education and health care worldwide.

REFERENCES

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