

VISA REQUIREMENTS / ISSUES

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For purposes of interviews and taking the Step 2 Clinical Skills examination (Step 2 CS), a US tourist visa, B-1 or B-2 will suffice.

One needs to consider long-term plans when applying to residency programs; i.e., plans to return to the Philippines or plans to stay in the US after residency. This is an important factor in deciding which programs you would want to focus on or prioritize. This will also affect your timeline in taking the exams from the USMLE Step 1 to Step 3.

For persons who are not US citizens or green card holders (permanent residents), there are two types of visas available: the J-1 and H-1B visas. First off, not all programs offer either or both. Some programs outright accept only permanent residents or American citizens.

J-1 Exchange Visitor Visa:

The **Exchange Visitor Program** started in 1961, as part of the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act. Its purpose is to “enhance understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries through educational and cultural exchanges”. This is the visa granted to some students, professors, and researchers, among others, who wish to study in the United States and intend to return to their home countries after they have completed their educational and/or cultural programs.

Sponsors and exchange visitors are required to comply with the Exchange Visitor Program regulations. It is essential that they become familiar with these regulations. A more detailed description of the J-1 Exchange Visitor visa is available at the website:

<http://exchanges.state.gov/education/jexchanges/about/22CFR62.pdf>

The J-1 visa for FMGs is sponsored by the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG). It is not sponsored by the residency program; rather the ECFMG sponsors the visa holder to study with the residency program. The ECFMG requires certification (i.e., the prospective resident is “ECFMG-certified”) prior to issuance of the **Form DS-2019**, Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor (J-1) Status. ECFMG certification occurs after an individual has completed steps 1, 2 CS and 2 CK of the USMLE.

Another requirement is the **Need for Training Certificate (NTC)** provided by the Bureau of International Health Cooperation, which is under the jurisdiction of the Philippine Department of Health (DOH). All information below is from their website:

<http://www.doh.gov.ph/bihc/index.htm>

Documentary Requirements for NTC through the DOH:

1. Application Form ([6 copies with original 2x2 ID pictures](#))
2. Certificate of appointment/acceptance/contract from the University or Training Institution in the U.S. (6 copies)
3. Valid Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) Certificate of Registration (6 photocopies)
4. Professional License from PRC (photocopy back to back, 6 copies)

New Applicants:

After documentary requirements have been reviewed and NTC signed by the authorized Department of Health (DOH) signatories – Dr. Maria Ofelia O. Alcantara or Dr. Florante E. Trinidad, the applicant should get a certified true and correct photocopy of NTC.

The applicant should then proceed to the Commission on Filipino Overseas (CFO) for interview scheduled every Wednesday 2:00 – 4:00 P.M. at the following address: *Citigold Center, 1345 President Quirino Avenue corner South Superhighway, Manila, 1107 Philippines* with E-mail address at cfodfa@info.com.ph.

Renewal:

- Same documentary requirements.
- If done personally, original contract, PRC license card and valid certificate of registration should be presented.
- If done by an authorized representative, all documents should be authenticated by the Philippines Embassy/Consulate nearest their place of residence.

The J-1 exchange visa requires the residency candidate to return to the Philippines for a two year period (the “two-year home residency requirement” designed to promote technology transfer between the US and the applicant’s home country). **(after how long do they have to go back home?)** This requirement can be “waived” if, after completing the residency program, the physician has been successfully matched with a hospital or office in an underserved area of the United States, or has begun employment with an interested US government agency such as the Veterans Administration. This is commonly known as “the waiver job”.

“Once a J-1, always a J-1”. The J-1 visa holder is still required to return to the home country for the two-year period even if he or she marries a permanent resident or American citizen.

H-1 Visa:

Obtaining the H-1B visa requires an extra step. In order to qualify for H-1B visa, one has to be ECFMG certified (i.e., passed USMLE steps 1, 2 CK and 2 CS), and must have passed the USMLE Step 3 prior to the program sending out the documents for visa sponsorship.

The H-1B category is an expedient and lawful method to bring foreign-born professionals temporarily to the United States (i.e., it is a temporary work visa). **If one intends to stay in the United States for good, this is the better visa to work with since it will pave the way for better job opportunities compared to waiver jobs offered to former J-1 holders.**

An individual may work in H-1B status for up to three years, and this can be extended for up to another three years (maximum of six years total). An extension of stay must be requested for an individual who is in H-1B status already and he or she is eligible for a longer period of employment. Certain aliens working on Defense Department projects may remain in H1B status for 10 years. The H-1B visa can be approved for more than six years in some cases depending on the status of the processing of the individual's employment-based green card.

The US Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) will generally not grant a H1-B visa to self-employed people. A company has to sponsor the visa. If the individual plans to work with multiple employers (i.e., moonlighting), he will have to obtain separate H1-B visas from each employer. .