



JAMES L. MADARA, MD
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, CEO

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March 24, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
600 19th Street NW
Washington, DC 20006

The Honorable Chad F. Wolf
Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
3801 Nebraska Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Pompeo and Acting Secretary Wolf:

On behalf of the physician and medical student members of the American Medical Association (AMA), I am writing to strongly urge the U.S. Department of State (DoS) to work with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to ensure that non-U.S. citizen international medical graduates (IMG) are not negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and can either continue, or begin, to serve a vital role in caring for patients during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Residents and fellow physicians are an important part of the health care teams serving on the front lines of the COVID-19 crisis. The AMA urges the DoS to open visa processing at embassies and consulates worldwide for physicians seeking to enter the U.S. to join residency programs on July 1, 2020. The AMA believes that any delay in the commencement of training programs will significantly compromise serving our nation's most vulnerable patients at hundreds of academic medical centers and safety-net facilities across the U.S.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. was already facing a serious shortage of physicians largely due to the growth and aging of the population and the impending retirement of many physicians.¹ Non-U.S. citizen IMGs play a critical role in providing health care to many Americans, especially in areas of the country with higher rates of poverty and chronic disease. Nearly 21 million people live in areas of the U.S. where foreign-trained physicians account for at least half of all physicians.² Individuals with serious chronic medical conditions, such as diabetes, are at a higher risk of experiencing serious complications from COVID-19.³ During this pandemic it is even more critical that our non-U.S. citizen IMGs have the support they need from the Administration to provide health care to those patients battling COVID-19. Therefore, the AMA strongly urges the DoS to do the following:

¹ <https://www.aamc.org/news-insights/press-releases/new-findings-confirm-predictions-physician-shortage>.

² <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/foreign-trained-doctors-are-critical-to-serving-many-us-communities.pdf>.

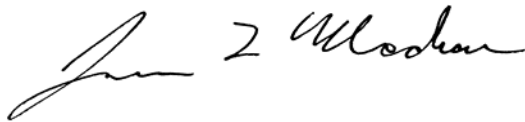
³ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/high-risk-complications.html>.

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- Work with the DHS to institute a process by which physicians already in the U.S. in valid visa status would receive expedited processing when seeking a change of status through U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to either begin a U.S. residency or assume a position in an underserved area of the U.S.
- Extend the 30-day grace period beyond the end of the nationally declared emergency, and allow extended training activities under supervision during this grace period consistent with pandemic response, as deemed appropriate by the program director.
- Issue a public statement confirming that J-1 physicians are permitted to be redeployed to new rotations within the host training institution as needed to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. If you should have any questions regarding this letter, please feel free to contact Margaret Garikes, Vice President of Federal Affairs, at margaret.garikes@ama-assn.org or 202-789-7409.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James L. Madara". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "M".

James L. Madara, MD

cc: William W. Pinsky, MD, FAAP, FACC
President and Chief Executive Officer
Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG)