

# CONEMAUGH MEMORIAL MEDICAL CENTER GRADUATE MEDICAL EDUCATION POLICY

## Visa Policy

### Purpose

Foreign nationals participating in Graduate Medical Education (GME) residency/fellowship programs who require visa sponsorship must obtain a J-1 visa sponsored through the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG).

### Applies To

All Conemaugh Memorial Medical Center (CMMC) Graduate Medical Education residency/fellowship programs.

### Policy

Programs considering a foreign national applicant who will require visa sponsorship must contact the GME Office after the match to discuss their individual circumstances for visa eligibility. CMMC sponsors J-1 Visa applications through and in accordance with the ECFMG. CMMC does not sponsor any H1-B training visas for residency/fellowship training.

### J-1 Visa

The J-1, or Exchange Visitor visa, is a temporary non-immigrant visa sponsored by the ECFMG, and administered through its Exchange Visitor Sponsorship Program, for foreign national physicians participating in graduate medical education training in the United States. The duration of participation for J-1 physicians in graduate medical education is the "time typically required" to complete the program, and duration is further limited to seven (7) years, provided that the J-1 physician is advancing in an approved program of graduate medical education or training. The J-1 visa holder is further obligated to return to their country of most recent legal permanent residence for at least two (2) years immediately following the completion of their training.

The Training Program Liaison (TPL) in the GME Office administers the J-1 visa sponsorship application process through the ECFMG for residents and fellows in accredited training programs.

- **Applications:** Applications for J-1 visa sponsorship are initiated with the ECFMG by the TPL following receipt of a signed offer letter from the Program. Programs are advised to contact the TPL as soon as the offer has been accepted. Applications will be completed by the TPL and exchange visitor via the ECFMG's online application system; however, the GME Office requests that all application documentation be submitted directly to the TPL for review and submission to the ECFMG. It is ultimately the responsibility of the applicant and the training program to ensure the timely submission of required documents to the GME Office. The ECFMG does not under any circumstances expedite review of any J-1 applications, regardless of applicant's program start date.
- **Processing Time:** ECFMG reserves 4-6 weeks from the time all required documentation is received for review and processing. It is therefore recommended that at least three (3) months be allowed for processing the application.

## **CONEMAUGH MEMORIAL MEDICAL CENTER GRADUATE MEDICAL EDUCATION POLICY**

- Appeals to the Department of State (DoS): Applications for J-1 category changes, extensions in training beyond 7 years, and advisory opinions will take additional time for review by the ECFMG and DoS beyond the time allowed for standard applications, and may take up to six (6) months.
- Fees: Exchange Visitors are responsible for all initial application fees and other registration costs.

### **F-1 Student Visa**

Foreign nationals who attended a US medical school on an F-1 visa may apply for a year of Optional Practical Training (OPT) through their medical school. Processing typically takes 3 months. The OPT year provides students sponsored on an F-1 visa with an opportunity for hands-on work experiences complementary to their academic field of study for up to 12-months. During this period the trainee will still be considered an F-1 student and will be issued an Employee Authorization Document (EAD) card. Prior to the end of 12-month OPT period, the trainee will need to apply for another type of visa in order to continue in the training program.

### **Reporting and Compliance**

Programs are responsible for notifying the GME Office of any changes to a J-1 resident/fellow appointment as soon as the planned change is identified in order to provide accurate reporting of visa status to the ECFMG, US Citizenship and Immigration (USCIS), and other government agencies, as applicable. This includes extended leave, adjustments to appointment end dates, and petitions for changes to visa status including approval of permanent residency.

### **References**

Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG) ([www.ecfmg.org](http://www.ecfmg.org))  
Exchange Visitor Sponsorship Program (EVSP) ([www.ecfmg.org/evsp/](http://www.ecfmg.org/evsp/))

GMEC Revised: 3/2018

GMEC Approved: 10/20/2016, 5/2018