



Council of Medical
Specialty Societies

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May 19, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
S-226 United States Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
H-232, United States Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
S-255, United States Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
H-204, United States Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Maintaining the Nation’s Physician Workforce during the Covid-19 Pandemic

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader McCarthy, Majority Leader McConnell, and Minority Leader Schumer:

On behalf of the Council of Medical Specialty Societies (CMSS), thank you for your leadership in addressing the health concerns and economic hardships experienced by all Americans as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

With more than 800,000 physicians across 45 specialties, CMSS recommends additional efforts to maintain the nation’s health workforce by retaining physicians and scientists currently in the United States and by expediting entrance of physicians into the country. A robust health workforce is crucial to ensure that patients can receive the critical care they need during these difficult times.

The U.S. health care system relies heavily on international medical graduates who are citizens of other nations (non-US IMGs), who represent more than 25% of the physician workforce in our country.¹ These physicians are training or practicing here legally on a visa or other protected status. Nearly 21,000,000 Americans live in an area where at least one-half of the physicians are foreign-trained.² These highly qualified physicians are an important segment of the nation’s health care in U.S. teaching hospitals and in medically underserved areas—especially now during the COVID-19 pandemic. The nation will face numerous challenges in the coming months. The Centers for Disease

¹ [https://www.bU.S.inessinsider.com/foreign-doctors-roadblocks-to-helping-with-U.S.-coronavirU.S.-pandemic-2020-](https://www.bU.S.inessinsider.com/foreign-doctors-roadblocks-to-helping-with-U.S.-coronavirU.S.-pandemic-2020-4?utm_source=sfmc&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=cfasnews&utm_content=newsletter)

[4?utm_source=sfmc&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=cfasnews&utm_content=newsletter](https://www.bU.S.inessinsider.com/foreign-doctors-roadblocks-to-helping-with-U.S.-coronavirU.S.-pandemic-2020-4?utm_source=sfmc&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=cfasnews&utm_content=newsletter)

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

Control and Prevention predicted “a second wave of the novel coronavirus will be far more dire because it is likely to coincide with the start of flu season.”³

CMSS appreciates the fact that the Helping Emergency Responders Overcome Emergency Situations (HEROES) Act of 2020 includes provisions to support non-US IMGs working on the frontlines to address the COVID-19 crisis. The HEROES Act of 2020 seeks to expedite the processing of:

- Temporary work visas and immigrant visas for health care workers looking to work in the U.S. amid the pandemic
- Green cards for physicians in the US engaged in or will engage in the practice of medicine or medical research involving the diagnosis, treatment or prevention of COVID-19

Furthermore, the HEROES Act of 2020 sets to temporarily extend visa expirations for those whose status may be set to expire during the COVID-19 pandemic. Clearly, the sponsors of the legislation understand CMSS’s and its members concerns that the nation properly support non-US IMGs as they provide critical contributions on the frontlines of the COVID-19 crisis.

CMSS also appreciates actions taken by the Department of State and the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to maintain the nation’s health care workforce, including resuming visa processing at embassies and consulates worldwide for physicians and medical residents as emergency and mission critical visa services and allowing “flexibility for some physicians to work in hospitals other than the one designated as their main employer.”^{4,5} IMGs serve as important members of healthcare teams at teaching hospitals across the country. The combined efforts of the Department of State and USCIS are critical to ensuring that these medical residents are able to join their programs which begin on July 1.

CMSS recognizes and thanks the Administration and the Department of State for their flexibility and recognition of the importance of physicians in light of the recent Executive Proclamation Suspending Entry of Immigrants Who Present Risk to the U.S. Labor Market During the Economic Recovery Following the COVID-19 Outbreak.⁶

However, more must be done to ensure that the nation has an adequate health care workforce in order to successfully address the current public health emergency. Therefore, CMSS urges Congress to encourage the U.S. Department of State and USCIS to:

- Assure that visa policies will continue to identify physicians as important for national security in terms of health.
- Continue and prioritize visa processing for physicians and medical residents

³ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/04/21/coronavirus-secondwave-cdcdirector/>

⁴ [https://www.buS.inessinsider.com/foreign-doctors-roadblocks-to-helping-with-U.S.-coronavirU.S.-pandemic-2020-](https://www.buS.inessinsider.com/foreign-doctors-roadblocks-to-helping-with-U.S.-coronavirU.S.-pandemic-2020-4?utm_source=sfmc&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=cfasnews&utm_content=newsletter)

[4?utm_source=sfmc&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=cfasnews&utm_content=newsletter](https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/News/visas-news/update-on-h-and-j-visas-for-medical-professionals.html)
⁵ <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/News/visas-news/update-on-h-and-j-visas-for-medical-professionals.html>

⁶ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/proclamation-suspending-entry-immigrants-present-risk-u-s-labor-market-economic-recovery-following-covid-19-outbreak/>

- Expedite USCIS adjudications of extensions and changes of status for physicians and medical residents practicing or otherwise lawfully present in the United States.

While certain visa programs are eligible for renewal, it is not a guaranteed process. CMSS recommends automatically extending visas and other protected status for physicians and medical residents already in the United States through the COVID-19 public health emergency to bolster the health care workforce feeling the burden of addressing the pandemic and guarantee greater access to quality health care for all Americans.

CMSS also recommends exempting physicians on H-1B visas seeking permanent resident status from the annual per-country limitation for employment-based immigrants. Many graduate students from international medical schools are ineligible for permanent resident positions after completing fellowship training due to the restriction that no country have citizens that comprise of more than 7% of total yearly green cards available worldwide for family and employment-based categories.⁷

Again, thank you. CMSS and the specialty society signatories below sincerely appreciate the swift congressional action to combat COVID-19. To provide optimal healthcare for Americans during this pandemic, CMSS urges you to consider the actions identified in this letter to maintain the health care workforce during this crisis.

If you have any questions, or if CMSS can offer any further information or assistance, please contact Dr. Helen Burstin, Executive Vice President and Chief Executive Officer of the Council of Medical Specialty Societies, at hburstin@cmss.org.

Thank you,

Council of Medical Specialty Societies

American Academy of Family Physicians
American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine
American Academy of Neurology
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Academy of Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation
American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists
American College of Emergency Physicians
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American College of Physicians
American College of Preventive Medicine
American College of Rheumatology
American College of Surgeons
American Epilepsy Society
American Gastroenterological Association
American Geriatrics Society
American Psychiatric Association

⁷ <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/reports/2019/07/29/472619/immigrant-doctors-can-help-lower-physician-shortages-rural-america/>

American Society for Clinical Pathology
American Society for Radiation Oncology
American Society for Reproductive Medicine
American Society of Hematology
American Society of Nephrology
American Thoracic Society
American Urological Association
Infectious Diseases Society of America
North American Spine Society
Society for Vascular Surgery
Society of Critical Care Medicine
Society of Hospital Medicine
The Society of Nuclear Medicine and Molecular Imaging