



## **Georgia Board for Physician Workforce**

State of Georgia

### **Georgia's Physician Shortage & The Role of International Medical Graduates White Paper - September 2009**

**Issue:** More Georgia physicians are practicing in specialized fields. At the same time, the workforce has experienced a decrease in primary care physicians and physician distribution remains a problem (particularly in rural areas of the state).

International medical graduates (IMG's) are playing an increasingly important role in meeting the need for primary care physicians in Georgia. In fact, Georgia's family medicine residency programs filled a combined total of 53 first-year positions in 2009. Of the 53 family medicine positions that were filled, 83% (or 44 positions) were filled by international medical graduates (n=21) and US international medical graduates (n=23).<sup>1</sup>

Current state licensing requirements for IMG's, combined with the length of time to obtain billing/provider numbers, create challenges for both IMG's and the hospitals interested in hiring these physicians. State law requires IMG's to complete three years of graduate medical education (GME) or residency training to obtain a license.<sup>2</sup> International medical graduates cannot begin the process of applying to medical insurance plans (Medicaid, Medicare, state of Georgia CMO, etc.) until they are granted a medical license.<sup>2</sup>

#### **What are repercussions of the current state law?**

- Georgia will continue to lose IMG's to other states that license after two years.
- Georgia's three year requirement prevents IMG's from starting work and seeing patients in Georgia communities immediately following graduation from residency.
- Then once they do obtain their license, there are additional (often significant) delays in getting provider numbers from medical insurance plans.
- According to the Georgia Hospital Association (GHA), "hospital members are experiencing delays in the physician credentialing and enrollment process, often times resulting in lost revenue for billable Medicaid and CMO covered services."<sup>3</sup>

#### **How can the issue be remedied?**

If the state seeks to retain these physicians who are specializing in primary care and encourage them to practice in areas of need upon graduation from residency training, a legislative change is needed to allow IMG's to apply for licensure after two years of GME (instead of three years).

**Applicable Code Section:**

O.C.G.A. 43-34-26(a)(3)

**Additional Background:**

***Requirements of the Georgia Composite Medical Board (GCMB)<sup>2</sup>***

- Graduates of medical schools accredited by the Liaison Committee for Medical Education (LCME) or the American Osteopathic Association (AOA) must complete **one year** of residency training (includes U.S., Puerto Rico, and Canada).
- Graduates of all medical schools outside of the U.S., that are not LCME or AOA accredited, must complete **three years** of residency training.
- The requirement for graduates of medical schools outside of the United States to complete three years of residency training in order to obtain a medical license in Georgia was put into effect July 1, 1985. Prior to that time, the requirement was one year.

***Presence of International Medical Graduates in Georgia's Residency Programs***

- 70.4% of residents currently in training in Georgia's family medicine residency programs are IMG's.<sup>4</sup>
- 30% of respondents to the GBPW's 2008 GME Exit Survey, which is administered to graduates of **ALL** Georgia's residency programs, were IMG's (136 out of 454).<sup>5</sup>

***Influence of GME Programs on Graduates' Practice Location***

- History has shown that a significant percentage of physicians tend to locate their practice within 60 miles of where they completed their Graduate Medical Education (GME) or residency training. For example:
  - Over the last 5 years, 63% of the graduates from Georgia's Family Medicine Programs have remained in-state.<sup>6</sup>
  - The 2008 GME Exit Survey, which was administered to all residents completing training in Georgia, found that 59% of respondents with confirmed practice plans reported plans to practice in Georgia.<sup>5</sup>
    - Over 80% of the respondents remaining in the state reported plans to practice within a 60 mile radius of their residency program location.<sup>5</sup>

**Recommendation:**

- Modify Georgia law to allow licensure of IMG's after completion of two years of residency training. Two years of residency training would appear to be an appropriate standard for the following reasons:
  1. Twenty-one states currently license IMG's after two years.<sup>7</sup>
  2. A two-year residency training requirement would allow residents to be fully licensed in the third year of their residency program.

3. A two-year requirement would allow for a quicker and smoother transition between residency training and independent medical practice in order for the IMG graduates to start seeing patients in Georgia communities.

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<sup>1</sup> National Resident Matching Program (NRMP); 2009 NRMP Main Residency Match: Match Results by State and Specialty.

<sup>2</sup> Georgia Composite Medical Board; Frequently Asked Questions to the Staff of the Georgia Medical Board Regarding the Physician Licensure Process.

<sup>3</sup> Georgia Hospital Association (GHA); 2009 GHA Legislative Agenda Document.

<sup>4</sup> Georgia Board for Physician Workforce; Staff Survey of Georgia's Family Medicine Residency Programs; August 31, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Georgia Board for Physician Workforce; Physician Supply and Demand Indicators in Georgia: A Survey of Georgia's GME Graduates Completing Training in June 2008 [published February 2009].

<sup>6</sup> Family Medicine Residency Programs' Annual Graduate Practice Location Reports; GBPW staff analysis of retention rates for the five year period FY2004 - FY2008. FY2009 retention rates are in the process of being compiled.

<sup>7</sup> Federation of State Medical Boards ([www.fsmb.org](http://www.fsmb.org)); State-specific Requirements for Initial Medical Licensure [for US Medical School Graduates and International Medical School Graduates] as of May 2008.