Pathway to Medical Licensure in the United States: A General Guide

U.S. Pre-Medical
- Register for MCAT
- Apply with AMCAS and/or AAMCAMS

U.S. Medical School
1st Year

U.S. Medical School
2nd Year
- USMLE Step 1
- COMLEX-USA Level 1

U.S. Medical School
3rd or 4th Year
- USMLE Step 2 CK
- COMLEX-USA Level 2 CE

U.S. Medical School
4th Year
- Register for NRMP
- Register for ERAS
- Obtain MD or DO degree

After the Start of U.S. Residency
- USMLE Step 3
- COMLEX-USA Level 3
- Apply for state training license, if indicated, or full and unrestricted state medical license, if eligible

Before the End of U.S. Residency/Fellowship
- Begin to apply for employment or make plans for independent practice
- Apply for full and unrestricted state medical license(s)
  - Apply with FCVS (if applicable)
  - Apply with Uniform Application (if applicable)
  - Apply with individual state medical board(s) (if applicable)
If indicated/desired:
- Apply for ABMS/AOA Specialty Board Certification Exam
- Apply for hospital privileges
- Apply for provider status with health insurance companies
- Apply for DEA Registration, if applicable
- Obtain Medicare/Medicaid privileges, if applicable

Ongoing Medical Practice
- State licensure renewal, including state-specific requirements, if indicated, such as:
  - Continuing Medical Education
  - ABMS Continuing Certification and/or Osteopathic Continuous Certification, if desired
  - If more than one state medical license is desired, apply for IMLC where applicable
Definition

AACOMAS – The American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine Application Service is a centralized application service for colleges of osteopathic medicine in the United States through the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine®.

AMCAS® – The American Medical College Application Service®, a program of the Association of American Medical Colleges, is a centralized application processing service that is only available to applicants to first-year entering classes at participating allopathic (MD) U.S. medical schools.

COMLEX-USA – The Comprehensive Osteopathic Medical Licensing Examination (COMLEX-USA) is a multi-part assessment given by the National Board of Osteopathic Medical Examiners (NBOME) to students and graduates of osteopathic medical education programs accredited by the American Osteopathic Association's Commission on Osteopathic College Accreditation. The NBOME eligibility criterion requires COMLEX Level 1 to be taken after successful completion of the 1st academic year of an osteopathic medical school program. Level 2-CE can be taken after successful completion of the 2nd academic year and passing Level 1. The COMLEX-USA Level 3 is usually taken during residency training and after successful completion of Levels 1-2, though in certain circumstances Level 3 may be taken by osteopathic medical school graduates prior to beginning residency training.

ECFMG® – The Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG) provides a certification program for international medical graduates (IMGs) to assess their readiness prior to entering into ACGME-accredited residency or fellowship training programs in the United States.

ERAS® – The Electronic Residency Application Service (ERAS®) was developed by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) to allow medical school students and graduates to apply electronically for residency positions in accredited U.S. programs of graduate medical education.

FCVS – The Federation Credentials Verification Service, a service of the Federation of State Medical Boards, establishes a permanent, lifetime repository of primary-source verified core credentials (medical education, postgraduate training, examination history, board action history, board certification and identity) for physicians and physician assistants. This repository can be forwarded, at the applicant’s request, to nearly any state medical board, hospital, health care facility or other entity.

IMLC – The Interstate Medical Licensure Compact offers a new, voluntary expedited pathway to licensure for qualified physicians who wish to practice in multiple states. While making it easier for physicians to obtain licenses to practice in multiple states, the Compact strengthens public protection by enhancing the ability of states to share investigative and disciplinary information. The Compact is being implemented in a growing number of states, with others expected to adopt it soon.

MCAT® – The Medical College Admission Test® is a standardized, multiple-choice examination designed to assess the examinee’s problem solving, critical thinking, knowledge of science concepts and principles prerequisite to the study of medicine. A new version of the test is expected in 2015.

ABMS Continuing Certification – Continuing certification is an ongoing program that embodies a lifelong dedication to professional growth and excellence as well as a commitment to the ABMS/ACGME Core Competencies. ABMS approved new Standards for Continuing Certification in 2021. The Standards – which will be effective January 1, 2024 – provide a framework for certification programs that meaningfully engage physicians in activities relevant to their practice and that ensure physicians have the knowledge, judgment, and skills to provide excellent patient care. The Standards also maintain the social contract between the medical profession and the public to improve the quality, safety, and value of health care.

NRMP® – The National Resident Matching Program provides an impartial venue for matching applicants’ and programs’ preferences for each other consistently.

OCC – The American Osteopathic Association (AOA) Bureau of Osteopathic Specialists consists of 18 specialty-certifying boards. Effective in 2013, each AOA specialty certifying board requires an Osteopathic Continuous Certification (OCC) process for all doctors of osteopathic medicine (DOs) with time-limited certifications. OCC runs on a 6-10 year cycle depending upon the specific specialty board.

UA – The Uniform Application, a service of the Federation of State Medical Boards, is a Web-based application that standardizes and streamlines the licensure application process for MDs, DOs and Residents. Applicants fill out the online UA once and then use it whenever they apply for a license in another state for the rest of their careers. The UA is a standard licensure application form that serves as the core of a state’s license application without replacing unique state-level requirements, which are collected and submitted via a state-specific addendum.

USMLE® – The United States Medical Licensing Examination® (USMLE®) is a jointly sponsored program of the Federation of State Medical Boards and the National Board of Medical Examiners®. The USMLE is open to students/graduates of accredited medical school programs issuing the MD or DO degree and to students/graduates of international medical schools eligible for certification by the ECFMG. In general, Step 1 is usually taken at the end of the 2nd academic year of medical school; Step 2 Clinical Knowledge (CK) is generally taken before the end of the 3rd academic year. Most examinees take Step 3 within the first 18 months of residency training, though under certain circumstances some IMGs and U.S. medical school graduates may take Step 3 prior to beginning residency training.