



October 26, 2020

**Association of**

**American Medical Colleges**

655 K Street, NW, Suite 100, Washington, DC 20001-2399

T 202 828 0460 E [djskorton@aamc.org](mailto:djskorton@aamc.org)

[aamc.org](http://aamc.org)

**David J. Skorton, MD**

President and Chief Executive Officer

Sharon Hageman  
Acting Regulatory Unit Chief  
Office of Policy and Planning  
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
500 12th Street, SW  
Washington DC 20536

***Re: Establishing a Fixed Time Period of Admission and an Extension of Stay Procedure for Nonimmigrant Academic Students, Exchange Visitors, and Representatives of Foreign Information Media (DHS Docket No. ICEB-2019-0006)***

Dear Acting Regulatory Unit Chief Hageman:

The AAMC (Association of American Medical Colleges) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the Sept. 25, 2020, Department of Homeland Security proposed rule, titled Establishing a Fixed Time Period of Admission and an Extension of Stay Procedure for Nonimmigrant Academic Students, Exchange Visitors, and Representatives of Foreign Information Media (DHS Docket No. ICEB-2019-0006). The AAMC recommends that the rule be withdrawn in light of the potential detrimental impact on U.S. patients and academic medicine, including the physician and biomedical research workforce.

The AAMC is a not-for-profit association dedicated to transforming health through medical education, health care, medical research, and community collaborations. Its members are all 155 accredited U.S. and 17 accredited Canadian medical schools; more than 400 teaching hospitals and health systems, including Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers; and more than 70 academic societies. Through these institutions and organizations, the AAMC leads and serves America's medical schools and teaching hospitals and their more than 179,000 full-time faculty members, 92,000 medical students, 140,000 resident physicians, and 60,000 graduate students and postdoctoral researchers in the biomedical sciences.

Below, the AAMC outlines the cohorts of academic medicine individuals using F-1 student and J-1 exchange visitor visas who would be impacted by the elimination of duration of status, and the corresponding additional applications, fees, and uncertainty. These students, scholars, trainees, medical residents, postdoctoral researchers, and physicians are critical to the nation's health and biomedical research infrastructure.

**Medical Students**

More than 1,300 international students are currently enrolled in U.S. medical schools. These students can be counted among the best and the brightest in the world and add to the quality and diversity of the learning environment at U.S. medical schools. Additionally, they represent a

critical educational investment as the country faces nationwide physician shortages — the AAMC projects the shortage will grow to between 54,100 and 139,000 physicians by 2033. While the average time to completion of an MD degree is approximately four years, many institutions encourage additional education, training, and research experiences that require additional time and would necessitate an extension should duration of status be eliminated.

Additional information regarding the impact on students is available in comments submitted by the higher education community, including the AAMC, in a joint letter led by the American Council on Education (ACE).

### **Medical Residents and Fellows**

After medical school, every state requires graduate medical education for physicians to practice independently. Currently, there are more than 12,000 physicians in the U.S. on J-1 exchange visitor visas in medical residency or fellowship training. While most U.S. residency programs last from three to seven years, and fellowships from one to three years, training contracts are renewed annually to ensure that competencies are met and that a physician is fit to advance in a training program. As a result, if duration of status is eliminated, J-1 physicians will be required to apply each year for an extension of stay through a USCIS Service Center or foreign consulate. Teaching hospitals typically issue contracts to residents and fellows each year in February or March in advance of a new academic year starting in July. With current published USCIS change/extension of status processing times lasting as long as 19.5 months, thousands of J-1 physicians will see their training programs interrupted and, as a result, patient care at hundreds of U.S. teaching hospitals will be compromised. Downstream, the patients most impacted will be those in rural and other underserved areas, particularly those relying on the historically successful State Conrad 30 J-1 visa waiver programs that have recruited more than 10,000 international physicians to underserved communities.

Additional information regarding the impact on medical residents and fellows is available in [comments jointly submitted Oct. 8](#) by the AAMC, the Education Commission for Foreign Medical Educations (ECFMG), the American Council on Graduate Medical Education (ACGME), the National Resident Matching Program (NRMP), the American Hospital Association (AHA), and the American Medical Association (AMA).

### **PhD Students**

In addition to training the nation's physicians, academic medical centers train the majority of biomedical scientists in the United States. PhD programs attract talented international students from around the world, often on J-1 visas. According to the National Institutes of Health, in 2017, the average time to complete a PhD was 6.1 years. A four-year limit would mean that almost all international PhD students must apply for a visa extension in order for them to complete their degrees. This increased personal and administrative burden and uncertainty that the extension will be approved may cause prospective PhD students to decline to come to the US and instead seek out other countries to pursue their higher education, decreasing our skilled talent pool.

### **Postdoctoral Researchers**

Postdoctoral researchers are those persons who recently earned PhDs or equivalent doctoral degrees and who subsequently advance their training under the supervision of one or more investigators for two to five years before taking a permanent position in academe, industry, or government. Just as the medical residency has replaced the MD degree as the terminal credential in the preparation of physicians, so has the postdoctoral appointment effectively replaced the PhD degree as the terminal academic credential for those pursuing academic biomedical research careers. In the process of developing their own research skills, postdoctoral researchers perform a significant portion of the nation's research. According to the National Science Foundation, over half (approximately 144,000) of biomedical postdoctoral researchers are temporary visa holders from many countries around the world. They contribute substantially to the productivity of the nation's research institutions. Eliminating duration of status will obstruct international postdoctoral researchers from entering the U.S. and significantly impact our country's ability to attract the best and brightest scholars.

Considering the importance of these cohorts of individuals to the nation's health, the AAMC strongly urges you to withdraw the proposed rule and maintain the longstanding duration of status. Thank you again for the opportunity to comment. Should you have any questions or require additional information, please do not hesitate to reach out to me or Matthew Shick, JD, <mshick@aamc.org>, Senior Director, Government Relations and Regulatory Affairs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David J. Skorton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

David J. Skorton, MD  
President and Chief Executive Officer