

Colorado's IMG Advocacy Efforts

Driven by Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning (Colorado Welcome Back & Advocacy programs), and the International Rescue Committee of Denver

2/5/2021

After numerous iterations, we finally have a solid plan in place to help International Medical Graduates (IMGs) overcome barriers and become physicians in Colorado. Instead of running a bill to create an IMG working group, we opted for an existing group to conduct an in-depth study and develop recommendations by August 2021. As such, the Nurse Physician Advisory Task Force for Colorado Healthcare (NPATCH) will research barriers and identify solutions for IMGs so that we can utilize their expertise in mid to high-level positions.

NPATCH is a healthcare policy task force housed at the Department of Regulatory Agencies (DORA) with governor-appointed members representing physicians, nurses, the medical board, the nursing board, and consumer groups. While the group lacks a diversity and equity lens, we have already recruited two IMGs and a key ally from the Washington Academy for IMGs to join. World Education Services will likely be involved as they have been a driver for IMG legislation across the nation. We're somewhat skeptical about the recommendations NPATCH will produce, but it would position us to run legislation in 2022. A common critique from physicians is how to ensure that IMGs are competent to practice in primary care given that many have practiced in a different specialty abroad and how training varies by country. We hope to address this more fully with the personal experience of some exceptional IMGs, including one who we expect will match to medical residency in the coming weeks.

2/3/2021

After meeting with the Governor's Office of New Americans & DORA, we are withdrawing our IMG Working Group bill as the Nurse Physician Advisory Task Force for Colorado Healthcare (NPATCH) will conduct an in-depth study of IMG barriers. Several Representatives will sign onto a letter advising NPATCH to study IMG barriers.

12/10/2020

After multiple primary care physicians casted doubt on our re-entry training license for IMGs, we are pausing these efforts and are now trying to find a bill sponsor that would create a task force to examine IMG barriers to residency. If successful, we would have representatives from hospitals, medical residency programs, rural and urban healthcare associations, immigrant-advocacy orgs, and more. We will use Washington's IMG working group legislation as a model for our bill.

11/25/2020

Before IMGs can practice as licensed physicians in Colorado, they must get their credentials evaluated by the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG), pass the United States Medical Licensing Exams (USMLE), become ECFMG-certified, obtain US clinical experience, and complete a US medical residency program. Gaining acceptance into residency poses the greatest challenge due to biases against international medical training, preference for recent medical graduates, obtaining competitive exam scores, lack of professional networks, and more. Over the past 10 years, only 2.5% of Colorado's medical residency positions were filled by IMGs. CWB has 200+ active physicians enrolled in the program and has successfully helped 34 IMGs match to medical residency, but zero have occurred in Colorado.

Colorado sends its most talented IMGs out-of-state despite rural shortages of primary care physicians and the need for culturally and linguistically competent providers. To address these challenges, Spring &

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IRC are proposing an alternative license for IMGs that would eliminate medical residency and replace it with a supervisory model to obtain their MD licenses.

We are drafting a bill that would create a “re-entry training physician license” for IMGs. If we move forward with this option, we would need to make an amendment to [C.R.S. § 12-240-119](#), which is geared towards Colorado-licensed physicians who have been out of practice for two or more years.

Qualifications for the license include: getting their credentials evaluated by ECFMG, passing the USMLE exams, and becoming ECFMG-certified to ensure competency standards. Additionally, an IMG would either 1) provide proof that one has practiced for at least three years as a physician outside of the US; or 2) complete a training program to evaluate one's clinical readiness (e.g., CPEP, IMG bridge program at CU Anschutz). If these criteria are met, IMGs would be granted a re-entry training physician license to practice in a rural or underserved hospital in a primary care specialty for two or three years under the supervision of a licensed physician within a hospital system. Once an IMG fulfills the terms in the practice agreement, they would apply for a full physician license.

An Internist at CU Anschutz expressed great concern about removing medical residency despite his overwhelming support of IMGs. If we can get enough physicians and the medical community on board, we'll likely need to limit the license to IMGs who have practiced medicine within the past five years, which is problematic for immigrant and refugee physicians.

11/2/2020

Unfortunately, Assistant Physicians have not been able to bill CMS. To overcome the billing issue, we would like to use the same licensure qualifications we outlined but will call it a “conditional or restricted” MD license. The “conditions” would be implemented during the supervisory period, which can be removed once the IMG fulfills the practice agreement terms. We will meet with DORA to see if there are existing statutes we can amend.

9/16/2020

After researching IMG legislation and brainstorming realistic solutions for Colorado's General Assembly budget, we are moving forward with an Assistant Physician license for IMGs, closely modeling our bill after Missouri's AP legislation. We are meeting with lots of legislators and stakeholders about the license.

7/31/2020

At the end of July, the Senior Policy Advisor for Colorado's New American's Integration Office of the Governor convened an IMG stakeholder meeting bringing together staff from Colorado's Department of Regulatory Agencies, an Internist from CU Anschutz, some IMGs, and more. Spring Institute & IRC Denver drove much of the discussion to share lessons learned from the temporary limited license for IMGs during COVID. While those discussions have come to a standstill, we have shifted to a long-term strategy for IMG reforms and hope to introduce a bill for the 2021 legislative session. As such, we've started reaching out to malpractice providers, rural hospital associations, “IMG-friendly” medical residency programs, legislators, and other stakeholders to get as much buy-in as possible.