

Filipino Reporter

FAIR, FEARLESS, FACTUAL

March 11-17, 1977

US sets new exam for foreign medics to qualify for visas

By REUBEN S. SEGURITAN and ALLEN E. KAYE

Foreign medical graduates (FMGs) wishing to become permanent residents to obtain exchange visitor (J-1) status who have not properly filed applications for adjustment of status prior to January 9, 1977 or who are now required to pass a special two-day examination even if they have already passed the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG) exam and the Federal Licensure Examination (FLEX). The announcement is a blow to FMGs who had hoped that either the FMG exam or the FLEX would be considered as the equivalent to the ME exam. Hard hit are thousands of Filipino medical graduates who have been waiting for their immigrant visas for as long as seven years now.

Currently eligible for immigrant visas under the third preference category (under which most Filipino physicians filed their visa petitions) those with priority dates of June 1970 or earlier. Those physicians in the U.S. who were not able to timely file their I-485 applications for adjustment of status with the Immigration and Naturalization Service before January 10, 1977 would be required to take the new exam.

The new examination which will be developed and offered by the

National Board of Medical Examiners has been designated as the Visa Qualifying Examination (VQE), a requisite to the issuance of immigrant visas for FMGs who wish to qualify for immigrant visas as such and for exchange visitor visas. It will be made up of approximately equal proportions of basic science and clinical science test items in their customary multiple-choice format.

The first VQE exam has been scheduled for September 7-8, 1977 in a limited number of examination

centers throughout the world. Detailed information concerning the examination requirements will be released by April 15 at U.S. embassies and consulates. Applications must be received on or before June 15, 1977.

This development came after the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare finally made its determination of an equivalent examination to Parts I and II of the National Board of Medical Examiners (NBME) examination. The determination was required by the recent immigration law amendments signed by former President Ford last October and which took effect in January of this year.

Under Title VI of the Health Professions Educational Assistance Act of 1976, graduates of foreign medical schools coming to the United States to perform services as members of the medical profession are ineligible for immigrant visas under the third, sixth or non-preference visa categories unless they have passed Parts I and II of the NBME or its equivalent.

With regard to FMGs who are coming to the United States after June 30, 1978 they are required to pass the new exam in order to obtain their J-1 visas. A one year extension of these provisions relative to the issuance of J-1 visas was recently recommended by the Federal Government apparently to avoid a substantial disruption in health services.

Also an alien doctor will not be permitted to take the VQE examination unless he has passed an ECFMG English test not more than two years before the exam or must have demonstrated a performance acceptable to the ECFMG on the

Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) no earlier than January 1, 1976.

It is anticipated that many aliens will not be able to comply with the English requirement so the ECFMG has scheduled an English test in many of its examination centers throughout the world on May 25, 1977. Since the results of the English test will be out not earlier than the deadline for the filing of applications to the VQE, applicants are advised to file for the VQE so that if they pass the English test and have met all of the other requirements, they will be automatically registered and permitted to take the examination. Applications for the ECFMG English test should be received on or before May 30, 1977.

Examination centers in the U.S. are now located in twenty eight states. In New York, the centers are located in Albany, Buffalo, New York City, and Syracuse. In California, they are located in Los Angeles and San Francisco. Hawaii has its center in Honolulu. In the Philippines, the locations are in Manila and Cebu.

Meanwhile, it was emphasized that the semi-annual ECFMG exam (and ECFMG English test) will be administered indefinitely. For all FMGs, ECFMG certification continues to be a requirement for accredited graduate medical education training programs in the United States aside from being a prerequisite for licensure in 45 of the 50 states.