International Medical Schools

International medical schools, many in the Caribbean, often seem like an attractive alternative for students worried about medical school admissions. Before applying to one of these programs, you should explore all possibilities in the United States. Have you looked at postbaccalaureate programs? What about osteopathic medicine? Podiatry? All are excellent options.

You may think sand, sun, and beautiful island views are inviting and it is relatively easy to gain admission in an international medical school, but you need to consider a number of things:

- What is the attrition rate? Generally it is much higher than U.S. medical schools. Many students attending these schools have marginal test taking abilities and academic skills. This combined with the stress of medical school while living in another country and isolation from support networks leads to a high dropout rate (possibly with a sizeable accumulated debt).
- These schools can be expensive. One program charges about $12,000 per semester and has a 10 semester program. With books, travel expenses, room and board, you can easily pay over $200,000. At several programs, however, you are eligible for U.S. government loans.
- Do they offer third and fourth year clerkships in the United States?
- How many students passed the boards on the first attempt? They claim high pass rates, but this is after many students have dropped out. A number of schools also require pre-tests before they allow students to sit for the board exams. They may require a student to repeat a year if they are unable to pass the pre-test to keep up their “first attempt” pass rate.
- Graduates of some international medical schools have to be Education Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG) certified or complete a 5th year Pathway Program before entering a residency. Different states have different licensure requirements—you need to find out about this first.
- If you are thinking of starting medical education at an international school and then transferring back to a school in the U.S., you should know that this is rarely successful.
- Although graduates of international medical schools go into residencies in all specialty areas of medicine, they have a tough time matching with residency programs in highly competitive specialty areas. Many stay in primary care (which this country does need). If you want to attend one of these programs because of a low MCAT score and want a competitive residency, this might not be a good match for you.

Also see the ECFMG website at: http://www.ecfmg.org/