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IMGs are still MDs

Alison Spice, MD

What is an IMG you ask? IMG stands for International Medical Graduate. This includes anyone who attended and obtained their medical degree from outside the United States. Even though they may be a U.S. citizen and went to school outside the United States, they are still categorized as an IMG. However, you will have U.S. preceding the IMG, thus resulting in the title of US IMG versus non-US IMG (IMG that is not a U.S. citizen). But, in all seriousness, labelling an MD as an IMG not still an MD? Based on 2024 National Resident Matching Program (NRMP) results, IMGs made up over 14% of matched candidates. Meaning that over 14% of PGY-1 positions in emergency medicine were filled by US-IMGs or non-US IMGs.

As physicians we learn to see the patient as a person. To treat the person and not the disease. To deter from labelling the patient as the disease itself. Just like the patient with schizophrenia, instead of seeing the person we see the disease and the patient becomes the disease itself referring to them as the schizophrenic patient and not the patient's name. A concept that physicians attempt to deter from and to instill optimal individualized patient care.

It is time to adopt and practice this concept with MDs, regardless of where a degree has been earned. Is there a difference between where an MD degree is obtained, or is it universal?

Two years of rigorous textbook studies followed with two years of long intense hours in clinical rotations make up a majority of medical curriculum. Upon the completion Doctor of Medicine degree or the acronym MD is granted to the graduate. So

why is there a divide between where you went to school? I understand that if you want to practice in the United States that it is best to have experience with the U.S. healthcare system, but several of the international schools, particularly the Caribbean medical schools, require their students to complete clinical rotations in the United States. Is it the lack of knowledge or the lack of awareness?

Regardless, the culture needs to change. Individuals go to medical school in the Caribbean and other parts of the world for several reasons, not simply because they were rejected from a traditional U.S. school. That is not the case in several situations. I never applied to a U.S. or even Canadian medical school. So, why did I go to a Caribbean school for my education? The school I ended up applying to did not require me to complete the MCAT or complete pre-med requirements. This meant I would be at least a year or more ahead of others that would have to fulfil these requirements. Instead, I wanted a school that valued my life experience. A school that appreciated and acknowledged my pursuit in healthcare and how that experience would transcend into a Doctor of Medicine degree.

Deciding which and ultimately being accepted into a Caribbean medical school is no easy task. It is by far the more difficult path. For an IMG to succeed they must be persistent, dedicated, resilient, and persevere. There will always be pros and cons to whatever medical degree journey you choose. So, doesn't that mean a degree is a degree? It should be, it should mean that a MD is still a MD regardless of where you graduated. A sense of failure and sense

of less worthiness is attached to the term IMG. This needs to stop. IMGs need to be proud of who they are, proud of their accomplishments, and proud of their journey as it is the journey that will mold them into the doctors they are meant to be.

Alison Spice is a recent graduate from Saint James School of Medicine. She first entered healthcare as a nurse in Canada. She looks forward to gaining residency into emergency medicine this upcoming 2025 Match cycle. Alison has continued

to be involved in the different emergency medicine organizations as well as a mentor to her peers. She has even inspired some of her past nursing students whom she taught during Covid to pursue their Doctor of Medicine degree. In her spare time outside of medicine she is spending time with her husband, three daughters, and three dogs.

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