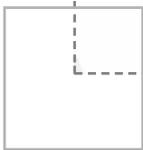PART | ONE

U.S. Medical Training

1 Goals and Objectives

We have all heard the stories of physicians before us. They worked diligently in medical school, excelled in all of their rotations, took numerous exams, and had excellent letters from the chair, the dean, and even prominent physicians—all to have their U.S. residency application rejected.

Why? What did they do wrong? Did they not impress the evaluating committee with their board scores and their extracurricular activities? Or was it where they went to medical school, their citizenship status, their age, their color, or their family background? Why weren't they able to match in their desired specialty?

The answer is simple: They did not have a plan, and they did not focus on what was most important as an International Medical Graduate (IMG). Obtaining a U.S. residency position is difficult, but exceedingly so for the IMG. It is imperative that the IMG become well organized and prepared to actively work to achieve his or her goals.

There are numerous how-to guides on negotiating the U.S. residency process, but unfortunately, most of these books are geared toward U.S. medical students or graduates. Furthermore, most of these books do not describe what the IMG has to do *differently* in order to be competitive except to state in vague terms "to work harder." The notion to work harder and achieve higher grades is obvious to most IMGs. What you need to be a successful IMG are the crucial steps or unwritten strategies that will solidify your chances of obtaining a U.S. residency, not an explanation of why your situation is so difficult.

▶ U.S. Residency Training and Competition

Obtaining a U.S. residency is a goal shared by numerous IMGs throughout the world. Regrettably, a large proportion of the IMGs interested in this training will never be able to receive it—not because they were not academically deserving, but simply because of the competition for these posts.

Residency training in the United States is highly desirable for numerous reasons, including the ability to utilize cutting-edge technology or involve oneself in research that is not found in other countries and the postgraduate training that has trained a large percentage of the world's best doctors.

Training in the United States may be superior in many ways, with the largest benefit of U.S. training being that the quality of your training is regulated to ensure that you receive the training you need to be a competent physician or surgeon. What you do with this training then falls upon you.

Many IMGs have returned home to serve as consultants in their own countries, teaching in turn what they were taught based on the latest advances in science and medicine. Other IMGs have taken a different approach and decided to stay in the United States. Some serve in underserved areas, whereas others have immigrated to the United States permanently and have started a new way of life. Whatever your path, the opportunity for you to succeed is possible in the United States.

▶ The Successful IMG

IMGs are in a different category when applying to the United States for residency posts. Not only are they trained in different countries, but their style, manner, language, and even the *type* of medicine they practice may be drastically different from what is typical in the United States. Consequently, it will be up to the IMGs to convince their U.S. educators that their previous medical training in their home countries is comparable to that of their U.S. applicant colleagues. If IMGs are successful at this task, then they have a strong chance of matching at even competitive residency programs.

▶ How This Book Will Help You Succeed

- *It works on your strengths.* Unlike any other book on the market, this book shows how being an IMG can actually be an advantage if the IMG discovers and focuses on what is most important in securing a competitive residency. Revealing what is most important and how to do well in these areas is the major premise of this book.
- *It shows you what you need to do differently.* The second area of focus for this book is what the IMG must do differently compared to everyone else when applying. The format throughout the book includes differentiation of the average versus the successful IMG (e.g., the average IMG will do X, but the *successful* IMG must do Y). This comparison reinforces what the IMG or foreign medical student must do to be successful.
- *It is based on research and experience.* This book gives specific and concrete advice. It reveals proven strategies and field-tested tactics from the personal experiences of more than 100 medical students and graduates who have successfully secured competitive residencies. Furthermore, this book is augmented by advice gained from interviews with various program and residency directors in the United States, validating the strategies mentioned. The specific personal anecdotes and experiences of many successful IMGs are also included throughout the book to provide real-world examples of the strategies mentioned.
- *It allows you to focus your energies on the crucial selection criteria.* This book was written as a result of the difficulty that many IMGs faced in obtaining accurate and applicable information regarding the U.S. residency process. The success of matching in a competitive residency (e.g., ophthalmology), which is historically difficult for even U.S. applicants, can be achieved by the IMG who is focused on the essential selection criteria.

The Successful IMG: Obtaining a U.S. Residency is a step-by-step guide, which will help you achieve your U.S. residency goals. If you faithfully put in practice the strategies outlined in this book, you will have put yourself in the best possible position when applying for U.S. residencies.

Each of the subsequent chapters deals with a specific and essential area for success and what you should be focusing on at that time. Whether you are in medical school, preparing for your United States Medical Licensing Exams (USMLEs), or in the critical application year, this book will guide you through the process.