Training International Medical Graduates: One Physician Assistant Program’s Experience

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Abstract

Background: MEDEX Northwest, the University of Washington’s Physician Assistant (PA) program, trained 28 international medical graduates (IMGs), who entered 12 postgraduate programs in total. This training program included an on-campus筛出, screening, and training individuals with prior health careers.

Admissions: IMGs entered clinical careers in various countries, some of whom were hired upon graduation and have typically stayed in their first job.

Recruitment & Admissions

• MEDEX is a two-year program, designed to build on previous clinical training.
• The program recruits experienced health care personnel for entry into the PA profession.
• A minimum of 2 years of full-time clinical experience is required.
• The competitive applicant pool means accepted students average 8 years of clinical exposure.
• MEDEX offers information sessions for program applicants, some of which are offered for specific groups such as IMGs.

Academic Performance

• MEDEX IMGs generally experienced few difficulties during the didactic phase of the program and tended to be average students academically.
• Some IMGs did experience some complications with communication, role socialization and role transition.
• It was not unusual for this group to have struggles regarding a lack of assertiveness and discomfort dealing with crisis.

Clinical Performance

• The MEDEX clinical training model includes close student monitoring including site visits.
• Clinical faculty were able to see quickly how well the IMGs were adapting.
• The IMGs—many of whom had been working as translators or other lower-level health workers in the US—generally made an easy transition to the clinical phase of training.
• They were grateful to be back in significant clinical roles.
• They all graduated on schedule and none were required to repeat any clinical rotations.

Outcomes

• The IMG-PAs passed the NCCPA PANCE certification exam on the first try.
• Of the 28 MEDEX-trained IMG-PAs, the program has employment data for 24.

Discussion

• Overall, the MEDEX experience in training IMGs as PAs has been positive.
• A major factor in this success has been the program’s experience in recruiting, screening, and training individuals with prior health careers.
• The IMGs enrolled in MEDEX are chosen partly for their realistic perceptions of the PA career and their perceived flexibility in adapting to a different medical role.
• The issue of supervised practice (physician assistants) as compared to independent practice (physicians) is carefully explored during the admissions interviews.
• Communication skills—especially in the areas of assertiveness and conflict resolution—were difficult for some students.
• IMG-PAs were quickly hired upon graduation and have typically stayed in their first job where they were employed.
• In some cases the IMG-PAs returned to the specialties in which they had practiced in their prior physician careers.

Figure 1: Applications, invitations to interview and acceptance data.

Figure 2: Zihan Li (from China) with MEDEX Program Director, Ruth Ballweg.

Figure 3: Geographic origin of MEDEX IMG-PAs.

Figure 4: Age at entry to the program.

Figure 5: Outcomes for IMG students (on a 4-point scale).

Figure 6: Current employment specialty of IMG-PA program graduates.

Figure 7: International Medical Graduates Employment Plan.