

PARTNERSHIPS

Prepping for medical practice in the United States

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INTERNATIONAL Medical University (IMU) will incorporate the United States Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE) preparation courses into its medical programme curriculum starting this year.

Marking this collaboration, IMU recently signed a memorandum of understanding with Becker Professional Education (Becker), making it the first to offer this fundamental key requirement to qualify medical graduates for a residency position and potentially practise professionally and legally in the US.

The course to prep IMU students for the USMLE aims to "elevate standards" of medical education in Malaysia and prepare graduates for overseas studies and opportunities.

The USMLE is known to be gruelling. It assesses a medical graduate's ability to apply knowledge, concepts and principles in addition to demonstrating fundamental patient-centred skills.

The examinations comprise a three-step process entailing Preparation as Step 1, Clinical Knowledge (CK) and Clinical Skills (CS) as Step 2 followed by Licensing as Step 3.

Passing the examinations in Step 1 and Step 2 renders the graduates eligible for the Education Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG) certification, and qualifies them to pursue licensure.

Becker Professional Development Corp Healthcare vice-president David Bartholomew said the ECFMG is a body that conducts the USMLE exam steps for foreign medical graduates.

"A pass in USMLE Steps 1 and Step 2, CK and CS will confer ECFMG certification. With this certification, candidates will be eligible to apply for the US residency. Step 2 is usually done in the clinical years," he said.

IMU medical graduates, whether in a local programme or in the Partner Medical Schools pathway, can undertake the USMLE steps to enter residency/fellowship opportunities in the US.

Being competent in the USMLE steps in their learning years gives an edge to the medical graduates and makes them better prepared for future challenges.

IMU recognises the need to offer a structured and well-established course to prepare future medical graduates for overseas studies and opportunities where they were previously unavailable.

Amidst concerns that the partnership may lead to further brain drain, the leaders at IMU are not fazed.

IMU School of Medicine dean Professor Datuk Dr Kew Siang Tong said: "We cannot control the number of doctors leaving the country but we can certainly contribute to ensuring the quality of our graduates to meet international standards.

"USMLE is considered a benchmark of one of the world's best medical standards.

"Even if the students choose not to embark on the exams, they would have been groomed



David Bartholomew



Dr Steven Daugherty

and equipped with the highest standard possible."

Presently, there are no well-established courses in Malaysian medical schools to prepare students for Steps 1 and 2 of the USMLE.

"Most students attempt preparation on their own, while a minority receive guidance from ad hoc workshops.

"However, these approaches have not proven to be helpful and with the difference that structured guidance can provide to the grades of students, IMU took the lead to incorporate USMLE preparation into its curriculum to prepare future medical graduates from day one.

"The university is confident that this link with Becker as a provider of quality education with a wealth of experience in USMLE preparation will serve IMU students well and gird them with a strong foundation in the fundamentals," she said.

The most valuable aspect of the partnership lies in the 36-month access to Becker USMLE Step 1 Preparatory Materials such as GuideMD and QuestionMD via an online portal that technology-driven and highly comprehensive.

Students will also benefit from tailored mock tests, self-assessments and live virtual interactive sessions with USMLE experts from Becker.

Starting last month, this access and integration are offered to the second intake of the 2017 medical programme cohorts at no additional cost.

Becker's courses (both live and online) are recognised by the Accrediting Council for Continuing Education and Training, a national accrediting agency recognised by US Department of Education.

Becker's faculty and curriculum director Dr Steven Daugherty said: "I have aided students in preparing for the USMLE and other similar exams for the past 26 years and am



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IMU School of Medicine
dean

privy to the difference that structured and guided preparation provides to these students."

Becker chose to collaborate with IMU in view of the latter's commitment to excellence in the field of medical studies, he added.

In addition to his role at Becker, Dr Daugherty is the author and co-author of more than 70 published papers and numerous book chapters.

He obtained his PhD in Psychology from the University of Chicago and has been on the faculty of Rush Medical College in Chicago for more than 30 years.

In May 2016, IMU conducted a workshop on USMLE Step 1 examination which was very well-attended.

A pilot survey conducted to gauge the interest among the student community during the workshop indicated strong demand for such a preparatory course.

Hence, a suitable preparatory course on USMLE Step 1 for IMU medical students is launched in partnership with Becker Educational Foundation — a US-based professional education provider.

The Preparatory Course blends with the IMU medical curriculum across semesters one to five and helps students identify the USMLE step learning through the semesters.

This integration gives students the opportunity to review the USMLE preparatory materials as they progress through the early medical phase. IMU faculty and the prep programme experts guide students when needed.

Preparing for Step 1 exams during Phase 1 Medical Science is ideal as it will give students more confidence as similar subjects are taught in the curriculum.

More effort in terms of time and money will be needed if the preparation for Step 1 exams is during the clinical years or after graduation.