

Medicine

Medical education in France is regulated jointly by the ministries of health and education.

The first year of medical study (PCEM1) is open to any student holding a baccalauréat. The number of students admitted for the second year of study (PCEM2) at each of France's faculties of medicine is set annually by ministerial decree so as to control the number of doctors in training. The number of international students admitted into PCEM2 is also subject to quota, expressed as a percentage of the number of French students admitted. Within this regulatory framework, each university is free to set its own curriculum, the content of which varies from one university to another.

The high quality of French medicine springs from the nation's hospital-based system of education and training, provided in Centres Hospitaliers Universitaires (CHU, or university hospital centers) by medical research practitioners whose academic depth is matched by significant "field experience."

GENERAL INFORMATION

Medical education in France is divided into three cycles or stages that lead ultimately to a government-sanctioned diploma of doctor of medicine.

The first stage (PCEM) lasts two years. Students who pass a rigorous examination at the end of the first year move on to the second year. The success rate on the exam is about 20%. Each faculty of medicine may admit a **maximum of 8% international students** (students from outside the European Union), provided their scores are high enough. To be admitted, a foreign student's score on the exam must be equal to or greater than the score of the lowest-ranking French student admitted. The same entrance examination is used for medicine, dentistry, and midwifery. Students who do not pass the exam on the first try may repeat the first year of study, but only once.

The second stage of medical education (DCEM) takes four years. Students receive a monthly stipend for the last three years. In 2006 the stipend ranged from 124 to 270 euros per month. To move on to the third stage of medical education, students must pass a series of tests of their theoretical knowledge and complete 36 months of hospital internships in various specialties. They must also be on call 36 times in three years (they are paid 25 euros for each period on call) and attend required seminars. Completion of the second stage is marked by the award of a Certificate of clinical and therapeutic synthesis.

Success in **national classifying examinations** (formerly known as the residency examination) allows students to enter a specialized program. There are 11 specialties, including general medicine. The choice of specialty and residency location are determined by the candidate's examination score.

In the **third stage of medical education** students elect one of two options: general medicine or a another specialty, all of which lead to the **diplôme d'études spécialisées (DES)**, or diploma of specialized study). The DES is offered in 30 specialty areas.

After a three-year residency candidates in general medicine receive their degree. During this phase of medical education, candidates perform full-time hospital functions, spending six-month periods in different departments. Residents are paid 1,336 to 2,052 euros per month (the amount rises as the residency progresses) and 115 to 126 euros each time they are on call.

Residencies in specialties other than general medicine last 4–5 years, depending on the specialty. Some DES degrees are supplemented by further training. The **diplôme d'études spécialisées complémentaire (DESC)**, or diploma of complementary specialized study) is earned in two years. Generalists may pursue the **capacité en médecine (CAPME)**. In 2007 a new DESC degree was created in palliative medicine and pain management.

With the DES (and possibly a DESC) in hand, residents defend a thesis before a jury before being awarded the **diplôme d'état de docteur en médecine** (state diploma of doctor of medicine).

International students from outside the European Union

(With special reference to the third stage of medical education)

Under no circumstances may an international student transfer into the medical curriculum without first completing the PCEM1 and passing the end-of-year examination. Foreigners who do not hold a medical degree from their home country must complete the first year of the PCEM and take the examination.

Candidates who receive a passing grade may enter the curriculum at the level they have attained in their home country. That level is determined through a careful examination of their academic record to determine the equivalence of the studies they have completed.

EARNING A DES, WITH OR WITHOUT A DESC, AND TAKING THE RESIDENCY EXAMINATION FOR FOREIGN CANDIDATES

DES

Students who pass the PCEM1 examination may work toward a **DES**.

The residency process for foreign candidates was modified in 2002. The period of preparation is five years for surgery and four years for other disciplines, during which students specialize in one of **7 disciplines** (anesthesia-recovery, medical biology, obstetrics/gynecology, work-related medicine, pediatrics, psychiatry, or public health) or one of **22 medical and surgical specialties**. Open to doctors from outside the European Union, the examination in each specialty area is organized by the DHOS (Direction de l'hospitalisation et de l'organisation des soins) of the Ministry of Health (<http://www.sante.gouv.fr> >> Emplois et concours DHOS >> Concours Internat étranger).

Registration materials may be downloaded from the DHOS site or obtained in France's embassies. Tests of eligibility to sit for the exam, involving general medical questions, are given in Paris and in France's embassies. The number of candidates allowed to sit for the exam is roughly double the number of available spaces in the training program (134 in 2004, 77 in 2006). **Admission tests** bearing on the candidate's discipline or specialty are given in Paris. Successful candidates begin their residency in May, at the beginning of the second semester of the academic year. [the second semester begins in May]

In the 2006 session, 1,211 candidates registered for the examination; 153 were deemed eligible to take it; and 65 passed it. The successful candidates came from 11 countries.

77 spaces were available, broken down as follows: surgical specialties, 19; medical specialties, 16; psychiatry, 15; anesthesia-recovery, 12; medical biology, 4; pediatrics, 4; obstetrics/gynecology, 3; public health, 3; work-related medicine, 1.

Successful candidates are notified individually of their admission by the Ministry of Health.

Upon assuming their residencies in France, residents receive a salary from the university hospital center to which they are assigned.

RESEARCH MASTER, PROFESSIONAL MASTER, AND MASTÈRE SPÉCIALISÉ: TRAINING FOR MEDICAL RESEARCH OR PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

While working toward the DES, after receiving the DES, or in lieu of the DES, international students, like French students, may supplement their medical education by earning a DESC, a **research master**, or a **professional master**, each of which requires two years of study. They may then go on for a doctorate (three more years).

Most programs leading to the *mastère spécialisé* (a degree accredited by the Conférence des Grandes Écoles, the national association of France's grandes écoles) are in management; they require five years of postsecondary study.

None of the degrees discussed above confers the right to practice medicine in France, which is determined by other criteria.

SHORT TRAINING PROGRAMS FORMATIONS COMPLÉMENTAIRES

In addition to the degree programs described above, France's universities offer short programs in medicine and related subjects.

Many foreign physicians visit France to take advantage of specialized graduate programs of high quality. The **attestation de formation spécialisée (AFS)**, or certificate of specialized training, is granted after 2–4 semesters to advanced medical students who are already pursuing a specialization in their home country. The **attestation de formation spécialisée approfondie (AFSA)**, or certificate of advanced specialized training, is a 1–2 semester program for graduate specialist physicians from abroad.

Visiting physicians may choose from among (i) programs recognized at the national level, such as the **capacités** (2 years, 10 different disciplines), (ii) degree programs unique to the university that grants them (**diplômes d'université, DU**), and (iii) programs recognized by a group of universities (**diplômes inter-universitaires, DIU**), many of which are open to nonphysicians as well. The choice is vast. In 2007, 2,185 such programs are offered.

Note:

Before coming to France to study medicine, students are strongly urged to take courses in French, especially medical French.

USEFUL LINKS

<http://campusfrance.org>

Online catalog of programs, searchable by level of study, by discipline, and by subdiscipline. A filter allows users to narrow their search if too many results are obtained.

<http://www.conseil-national.medecin.fr>

Site of the Conseil national de l'Ordre des médecins (national council of physicians).

<http://www.chu-reseau.org>

Locations and contact information for France's 28 university hospital centers.

<http://www.legifrance.fr>

Laws and regulations pertaining to the practice of medicine in France.

<http://www.sante.gouv.fr/concours/DHOS/Internat>

Downloadable forms and information on the residency examination from the French Ministry of Health.

<http://www.quotimed.com>

Guide to DU and DIU programs from the site of the journal, Le Quotidien du Médecin (physicians' daily)

<http://www.fda.ccip.fr/>

Information on the Diplôme de français médical (DFM, diploma in medical French) offered by the Chambre de Commerce de Paris (CCIP)

<http://www.alliancefr-saintmalo.org/>

French for the health professions (short course), offered by the Alliance Française of Saint-Malo

<http://www.ensp.fr>

Ecole Nationale de la santé publique (national school of public health)

<http://www.cmhp.asso.fr>

Collège de médecine des hôpitaux de Paris (college of medicine of the hospitals of Paris)

<http://www.kb.upsud.fr/kb/niveau2/medecinegene/textes/stages.htm>

Arrêté du 22 septembre 2004 relatif à l'organisation, au déroulement et à la validation des stages des étudiants en troisième cycle des études médicales appelés internes ou résidents - NOR : SANP0423091A (Journal officiel du 14 octobre 2004)

<http://www.pasteur-cnam.fr>

École Pasteur/Cnam de santé publique