MEDICINE

In France, medical studies come under regulations jointly established by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health. Anyone holding a diploma giving access to post-secondary studies (the equivalent of the French baccalauréat) can enrol for the first year of medical studies (PCEM1). But in order to control the number of students and physicians to be trained, an annual ministerial decree establishes the number of students who will be allowed to go on to the second year (PCEM2) in each university department (UFR) or faculty. The number of foreign students admitted to the second year is in turn subject to a quota based on percentage of the number of French students. Within this legislative framework, the universities are free to organise their own programmes, the content of which may vary from one institution to another. The excellence of French medicine stems from the originality of its hospital-based training, which is provided by university professors who are also practicing physicians.

GENERAL PRESENTATION

Medical studies are divided into three cycles leading to a State-recognised doctor of medicine diploma.

The first cycle (PCEM) lasts two years. A competitive examination at the end of the first year determines whether students can enter the second year (about 20% admitted). The maximum number of foreign students from outside the European Union accepted by each medical faculty or department is limited to 8 percent of total admissions, with the condition that the rank of the last foreign student is equal to or higher than that of the last French student admitted. The competitive examination is common to medicine, odontology (dentistry) and midwifery. It is not possible to enrol more than twice in the first-year programme.

The second cycle (DCEM) lasts four years. In order to go on to the third cycle, fourth-year students (remunerated at 263 €/month in 2004) must have successfully completed the second cycle and passed the theoretical course exams, validated all in-hospital training periods and participated in required seminars. A nationally ranked examination gives access to a specialty, the choice of which is determined by the rank obtained.

The third cycle includes two programmes of study, general medicine or other specialties, both of which lead to a Diplôme d’Études Spécialisées (DES, Specialised Studies Diploma). The internship for general medicine lasts three years and includes in-hospital service as well as a six-month placement with a practitioner. The internship for other specialties generally lasts four to five years, depending on the field. Certain DES programmes may be followed by a further specialised training programme leading to the Diplôme d’Études Spécialisées Complémentaires (DESC, Further Specialised Studies Diploma) after another twelve to eighteen months of study. The DESC, combined with a short thesis in medicine, leads to a nationally recognised Diplôme d’État de docteur en médecine (MD).

Foreign students from outside the European Union (especially third cycle)

One way to gain entry to the DES programme is through the “Internship as a foreign student” competitive exam, which was reformed in 2002. The preparation for this examination, which takes four years in medical disciplines and five in surgery, leads to specialised medical studies in ten disciplines or fields: medical disciplines, general practice, surgery (various domains), occupational medicine, public health, medical biology, psychiatry, anaesthesiology-surgical resuscitation, paediatrics, gynaecology-obstetrics. The competitive examination, open to physicians from outside the European Union, is organised in each field by the French Ministry of Public Health (Department of hospitalisation and healthcare provision/DHOS <http://www.sante.gouv.fr> under successive headings “Emplois et concours/DHOS/Concours de l’Internat/Internat en médecine à titre étranger”). Application packs may be downloaded from this site or procured from French embassies throughout the world. The pre-selection exams (épreuves d’admissibilité), which deal with questions of general practice, are given in the French embassies or in Paris. The number of students pre-selected corresponds to twice the number of openings (134 in 2004). The entrance exams per se (épreuves d’admission),
which deal with one of the ten disciplines or fields chosen, take place in Paris. At present, the starting date for the programme is 1 May.

In 2003, 1,292 candidates were authorised to register, 865 took the pre-selection exam (2/3 in the embassies, 1/3 in Paris for those already living in France). Out of the 200 candidates who passed this first exam, 92 were admitted to the DES programme (representing 26 different nationalities). Successful candidates receive individual notifications from the Ministry of Health. Upon entering the programme in France, they receive interns’ wages from the teaching hospital (CHU) where they are assigned.

**RESEARCH MASTERS OR PROFESSIONAL MASTERS: TRAINING PROGRAMMES FOR MEDICAL RESEARCH OR PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE**

During and after the DES, or outside of it, foreign interns, like their French counterparts, may also complement their medical training with a DESC (for research) through a DEA (an advanced studies diploma which is replaced by the 2-year Research Masters or the Professional Masters in the context of the BMD reform of the higher-education system). They can subsequently obtain a doctorate in three years.

**NOTE:** none of these curricula gives automatic access to the practice of medicine in France, which is also subject to criteria other than those of training.

■ Studying in France for a shorter period of time

Apart from the training described above, it is possible to obtain qualifications through shorter programmes. Some of the latter are reserved for foreign students and may be listed in the EduFrance catalogue, available on the agency’s website.

**Further training programmes: several months to two years**

Within the framework of third-cycle studies, foreign doctors can prepare for other highly respected certifications: the Attestation de formation spécialisée (AFS, Specialised Training Certificate) lasting two to four semesters, for students pursuing specialisations in their own countries, and the Attestation de formation spécialisée approfondie (AFSA, Advanced Specialised Training Certificate), lasting one or two semesters, for those who are already specialists. They can also prepare for nationally-recognised diplomas such as the Capacités (“capacities”, issued in some 10 disciplines) or for highly specialised diplomas, sometimes open to doctors and non-doctors alike, which are granted by individual universities - Diplômes d’université (DU) - or by a group of universities – Diplômes inter-universitaires (DIU). In all, there are some 2,000 of these programmes in France.

**USEFUL LINKS**

- http://sante.w3sites.net/etud_med.html#2
  - information on medical studies prepared by French Ministry of Foreign Affairs
  - list of training programmes in health fields open to foreign students
  - heading “Etudiants en santé” for information about students in health fields
- http://www.dcau-bordeaux2.fr/wsuio
  - national directory of medical-school diplomas
  - French-language health resources (introduction in English)
- site of the French Medical Association
    - access to legal regulations
  - Association of Paris hospital professionals (see heading “Résidents étrangers”)
  - downloadable applications for internship examination (see heading “Emploi et concours”)
- http://www.quotimed.com
  - guide for University and Inter-University Diplomas (site of Le Quotidien du médecin newspaper)