

Frequently Asked Questions: Non-Standard Training Programs (Non-ACGME-Accredited) and Other Information

What are the NIH's other clinical and translational (non-standard) training programs?

Like many other academic medical centers, the NIH trains physician-scientists at the Clinical Center in many different disciplines, techniques, and areas of research that do not fit within the usual framework for ACGME accreditation. Some of these programs are accredited through other accrediting bodies, but many others are “stand alone” or “one of a kind” entities. Training at NIH is unique in its emphasis on groundbreaking clinical and basic biomedical research, so trainees who choose non-standard training programs are usually focused on establishing a set of research or clinical skills that will support careers in academic medicine. A pre-requisite for most of the non-standard training programs is that the applicant has completed, at a minimum, residency training in a core specialty.

What are some unique aspects of a clinical fellowship on the NIH campus?

The [NIH Clinical Center \(CC\)](#) is a research hospital. All patients seen at the CC are enrolled in a research protocol. The CC is prepared to handle medical or surgical emergencies or critical illness but unlike community hospitals, there is no emergency room, and some services usually found in full service hospitals, such as Labor and Delivery, are not available. However, most medical or surgical specialty and consult services are available to assist with patient care issues.

Because all patients are admitted under Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved research protocols, the roles, duties and aspects of patient management are unique to the NIH Clinical Center. As a fellow, you will learn about the ethical responsibilities that you will undertake as both a researcher and clinician. As an agency of the Federal government, the NIH has ethics and conflict of interest guidelines, such as those pertaining to acceptance of gifts or awards, participation in outside activities, or investments in biotechnology or the pharmaceutical industry. To see if these guidelines apply to you, please visit the NIH Ethics Office website for more information: <http://ethics.od.nih.gov>.

Perhaps the most unique aspect of training at NIH is the freedom to ask questions and engage in the process of discovering answers. In this process, you will develop the unique skill set of a clinician-scientist, be trained by internationally-recognized experts in your field of interest, find willing and open partners to collaborate with both within and beyond your “home” NIH Institute or Center, and practice translational medicine at America’s largest research hospital. Whether you continue at NIH or pursue another career track after completing your fellowship, these experiences at NIH will positively contribute to your having a sustainable and differentiating career path.

Are there differences for fellows in non-ACGME-accredited programs?

The NIH fully supports equal opportunity in training for all clinical fellows enrolled in its sponsored programs. In general, the accredited and non-accredited programs on campus function similarly, but there are some differences to note. The NIH recognizes that a trainee's decision regarding what type of fellowship to pursue must be individually based on clinical and research interests and on future career goals. The NIH is committed to providing the requisite training opportunities for fellows to reach those goals, whether this is accomplished through programs subject to external curricular and organizational oversight or through internally administered programs designed to provide both individualized learner-centered biomedical education and specialized clinical research experiences.

The NIH does recognize that there are potential advantages and disadvantages to sponsoring both accredited and non-accredited training programs. For example, non-accredited training programs usually are in disciplines where the formal curriculum has not been completely defined, and the requirements for training cannot yet be written or generalized to other centers outside the NIH. A less structured program may not be the best fit for you, especially if you are seeking a prescribed curriculum, standardized hours and conventional patient-care experiences; however, it may work very well if you want the flexibility to find your "niche" as a clinician-investigator and have a strong desire to start building your own independent academic career. Other differences for clinical fellows in non-accredited programs on the NIH campus are illustrated in the answers to the questions below.

Do fellows in non-accredited programs receive similar benefits?

As Federal employees, all clinical fellows in non-accredited programs are eligible to receive standard benefits including paid annual and sick leave, health insurance, life insurance, and retirement. Annual salary conforms to a standard government pay model and is a function of the number of years (PGY level) spent in graduate medical training prior to matriculation in an NIH program.

Other benefits may be available to non-accredited program fellows at the discretion of the NIH Institute or Center administratively responsible for the operation of the program. Before accepting an appointment in a training program, interested fellows should discuss with the program director all terms, conditions and benefits of employment, and any other position-specific or work-life concerns, just as would be the case for any job negotiation.

Are fellows in non-accredited programs eligible for the NIH Loan Repayment Programs (LRP)?

There are a few different types of Loan Repayment Programs for intramural NIH fellows who are not enrolled in ACGME-accredited programs. These include the AIDS, Clinical, and General Research Loan Repayment Programs which require the submission of a competitive application and may have minimum years of training to qualify.

More detailed information about the NIH's Loan Repayment Program is available at <https://www.lrp.nih.gov/eligibility-programs>. . Please visit the Loan Repayment Programs website (www.lrp.nih.gov) or feel free to call them at 1-866-849-8047 or send them an e-mail to lrp@nih.gov.

Do the Duty Hours rules apply to fellows in non-accredited programs?

The NIH Graduate Medical Education Committee (GMEC) has established a policy addressing duty hours and “moonlighting.” The GMEC requires that all training programs maintain compliance with this policy. All fellows must also abide by the policies and procedures established by the Medical Executive Committee of the NIH Clinical Center and by the internal policies developed by their individual NIH Institutes or Centers and program directors.

Do I have to take call, and can I moonlight?

Call is considered an important aspect of graduate medical education training in programs accredited by the ACGME, and may be an important aspect of training mandated by the non-accredited programs. This will depend, again, primarily upon the perspective of your NIH Institute or Center (IC) and your training program director. Some ICs require that their fellows take call for the IC at certain stages of training. External moonlighting activities for fellows may be permissible with appropriate approval and oversight of the program director and this should be discussed with your program director well in advance of pursuing any specific opportunities to moonlight. Non-accredited Program fellows must ensure that external moonlighting, if permitted, will not interfere with their obligations to their Principal Investigator (PI) and to their Institute or Center for patient care activities. External moonlighting, if approved, will also require prior approval from the NIH Ethics Advisory Committee (EAC). These approvals take time to be completed, so the process should be started in advance of when you plan to start an external moonlighting position.

Does the NIH support visas for applicants who are not United States (US) citizens? How are credentials evaluated?

Applicants to non-standard training (NST) programs must keep in mind that if you hold a J-1 visa sponsored by the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG), some training offered by non ACGME-accredited programs which provide primarily research training may not be covered under the J-1 visa mechanism. Other visa options, such as the H-1B, may be available to some applicants who come for NST programs but applicants should contact the individual training programs directly for more information. As recommended above for the visa options, all applicants should contact the individual training program of interest directly for specific information about required credentials. More details about the NIH Visiting Program and other visa-related information are available at the Division of International Services (DIS) website at <http://dis.ors.od.nih.gov/>, but prospective fellows should routinely address questions first to their respective program directors who will then liaise with DIS on their behalf.

Concerning credentials for foreign trained medical professionals, it should be understood that all individuals providing patient care services at the NIH Clinical Center (CC) exercise only those clinical privileges granted upon recommendation of the NIH Clinical Center's Medical Executive Committee. Such privileges are issued to individuals only after their application for membership on the Active Medical Staff has been approved. Each individual's application is evaluated on the basis of prior education, training, experience, professional responsibilities, current clinical competence, health status, and active licensure and/or certification, if applicable. The NIH licensure policies state that each member of the Active Medical Staff at the NIH Clinical Center, including clinical fellows, shall possess and maintain a current, active license to practice in the United States, with few exceptions.

Who should I contact with questions?

The director of the training program in which you are interested, and the PI on the research projects in which you are most interested, should be your first sources of information. They will most often be able to answer questions very specific to your scientific and clinical interests. Before making a final commitment, be sure to meet and talk with others who can provide additional perspective on your career move and information about responsibilities and privileges. This includes current and former fellows within your prospective Institute or Center. To learn more about the day-to-day workings of the system, you may also wish to speak with the program coordinator.

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