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The Escuela Latinoamericana of Medicina in Cuba



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I WAS INTERESTED IN the small insert in the Medical Board of California newsletter for November 2008: MBC granted recognition to three international medical schools; one is *Escuela Latinoamericana de Medicina* (ELAM) in Cuba, or the Latin American School of Medicine.

I presume this means graduates of this school do not have the usual requirements of other international medical graduates and may apply for residency training just as any other graduate of an LCME-approved medical school in the U.S. or Canada can.

ELAM, founded in 1999, may be the largest of all medical schools. It has approximately 10,000-12,000 medical students from around the world, including about 100 from the United States (at least one was from Sacramento). The first class of 1,498 ELAM doctors graduated on August 20, 2005. Tuition, room, and board are provided for free with a small stipend.

ELAM's goal is to educate doctors who agree to practice medicine in underserved areas after graduation (I could not find a length of commitment statement). Admission preference is given to applicants who are financially needy and/or "people of color."

According to Wikipedia, U.S. applicants must have U.S. passports, be under age 30, and commit to practicing in underserved areas in the U.S. The first US pre-med students, 10 in all, enrolled in the Spring of 2001.

Classes are taught in Spanish, and the first year includes 12 weeks of intensive Spanish. After the first two years, students perform clinical activities in one of Cuba's 21 medical schools. Emphasis is on primary care, community medicine, and hands on medicine. U.S. students are expected to pass USMLE exams at the appropriate stages of their education.

According to Wikipedia, in June 2000, a US Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) delegation visited Cuba to meet with Fidel Castro. Representative Bennie Thompson (D-Miss.) mentioned that his district had a shortage of doctors. Castro responded by offering full scholarships for U.S. nationals from Mississippi at ELAM. Later that same June, the Cuban Minister of Public Health expanded the offer to all districts represented by the Black Caucus.

At a September 2000 speech, at Riverside Church, New York City, Castro expanded the offer to medical students from low-income communities from any part of the USA with, perhaps, half reserved for African-Americans and half for Hispanics and Native Americans.

The ELAM offer to US students was classified as a "cultural exchange" program by the U.S. State Department to avoid restrictions of the U.S. embargo against Cuba. In 2004, the legality of the presence of US students at ELAM was threatened by tightened restrictions against travel to Cuba by U.S. nationals. A CBC campaign led by Representatives Barbara Lee (D-Calif.) and Charles Rangel (D-NY) persuaded Secretary of State Colin Powell to exempt ELAM from the tightened restrictions.

Applications from US citizens are administered through the New York City-based Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization (IFCO), headed by the noted human rights activist and critic of the U.S. embargo of Cuba, the Rev. Lucius Walker, Jr.

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