

Reflections from an H1B Physician in Rural America

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As a pediatrician and H1B visa holder, I feel compelled to share my perspective on the current situation many international medical graduates face. While we dedicate ourselves to serving communities, we continue to grapple with the uncertainty of living in the U.S. on a temporary status.

I came to this country in 2011, and since 2016 I have been serving rural America. Despite my commitment, each time I leave the country, I fear whether I will be allowed to return. I worry about whether my children—both U.S. citizens—will be able to continue school uninterrupted. This constant uncertainty weighs heavily on many immigrant physicians like myself.

The backlog in the green card process, particularly for applicants from India, has left countless physicians in limbo. India, now the most populous country, has a large number of skilled workers—especially in the technology sector—who apply for permanent residency. Because there is a fixed annual quota of green cards per country, the sheer number of applications means that physicians, though few in number, are caught in the same decades-long wait as tech professionals.

Unlike researchers who may qualify under the EB1 category due to academic achievements and citations, many of us have chosen to focus on clinical medicine. That choice should not diminish the value of our contribution. In fact, immigrant physicians disproportionately serve in rural and underserved areas, often through National Interest Waiver (NIW) programs. After five years of service, we qualify under NIW, but this does not expedite the green card process.

I have now served rural America for nearly a decade. In my experience, immigrant physicians are the backbone of many small towns—providing essential care, raising families, and building communities. Yet, despite this, we remain tied to an uncertain future.

I believe that physicians serving in rural and underserved areas should not be placed in the same queue as all other skilled professionals. Our work is in the national interest. We are contributing to healthcare access where it is most needed. Clinical physicians should have a pathway—similar to researchers—to qualify for expedited green card consideration.

I urge policymakers to recognize the unique contributions of physicians in direct patient care. Forcing clinicians into research simply to qualify for a faster immigration track undermines both our passions and our communities' needs. We love what we do, and we do it well. What we seek is the ability to continue our work and raise our families here with certainty and stability.

Thank you,



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