

USMLE Preparation in New Zealand Frequently Asked Questions

1. **Who are Kaplan International Colleges and Kaplan Medical? Are they the same company?**

Kaplan International Colleges and Kaplan Medical are divisions of Kaplan, Inc (an educational subsidiary of The Washington Post and a sister division of Newsweek). Kaplan International Colleges operates the English Language business of the company. Kaplan International Colleges in New Zealand has an established reputation for providing quality English language courses and is one of the longest running schools, having been in operation for more than 30 years. Kaplan Medical offers a range of exam preparation courses for licensure in the United States and Canada. Kaplan International Colleges and Kaplan Medical are combining their expertise to offer medical professionals the opportunity to study USMLE in New Zealand.

2. **What is USMLE?**

USMLE is general exam for all medical doctors. USMLE Exam has 4 sections, or Steps. The 4 Steps are Step 1, Step 2 CK, Step 2 CS and Step 3. Where a medical doctor would like to practise medicine determines which Steps should be taken. In New Zealand, Step 1 and Step 2CK are required to become a registered doctor.

3. **What are the differences between the 4 Steps and the Exams?**

STEP 1

Step 1 tests how well the examinee applies basic, integral science concepts to clinical scenarios. The examination covers the 8 core disciplines of science (Anatomy, Behavioural Science, Biochemistry, Medical Genetics, Microbiology/Immunology, Pathology, Pharmacology, Physiology) and teaches students strategies to prepare for the exam. The USMLE Step 1 Exam is a computer-based 8 hour examination. The examination is multiple choice (5 possible answers) with 336 questions equally weighted.

STEP 2CK

The Step 2 Clinical Knowledge (CK) focuses on clinical sciences and is designed to determine whether the examinee possesses the medical knowledge and understanding of clinical science, which are considered essential for the provision of patient care under their supervision. The USMLE Step 2 CK is a computer-based 9 hour examination. Like Step 1, it is a multiple choice examination with 370 questions (with 5 possible answers each) and each question equally weighted.

STEP 2 CS

The Step 2 Clinical Skills (CS) exam is a "hands-on" exam that tests the examinee's clinical and communication skills through his/her ability to gather information from standardised patients, perform a physical examination, communicate the findings to the patient and write a patient note. This test is only offered in the USA and is not required in New Zealand to become a doctor. The examinees spend one day at one of the 5 examination centres which is a simulated doctor's office. The examinee will interact with 12 patients (actors), and the examinee must perform medical examinations and write a report how they would treat the patient. They must pass all 12 patient interactions.

STEP 3

Step 3 is a multiple-choice two-day exam which assesses the examinee's ability to apply medical knowledge and the understanding of biomedical and clinical science essential for the unsupervised practice of medicine, with emphasis on patient management in independent settings. Step 3 is not a requirement for residency in New Zealand or US. It is often completed by US doctors after 1st year of residency, but many international students will do it before applying for residency, because it is perceived as an advantage for some US residency programs, and also allows them to get the H1B visa instead of the J 1 visa (a J1 visa is an exchange visa which requires them to go home at the end of the residency

program). The first day and a half is computer-based, but second half of day 2 is clinical case simulations which tests how they manage a patient.

4. Where do students take the USMLE courses in New Zealand?

In New Zealand, students will take the USMLE preparation courses at our Christchurch centre. We aim to open our Auckland centre by late 2010. Both centres are conveniently located in the city and provide ample space for the students to prepare for the exams.

5. What are the Academic Entry Requirements for USMLE?

All students must meet the following Academic Requirements:

Students must be a medical student or graduate. Please note that students' medical school **must** be listed on the list in the FAIMER directory to be eligible to take the USMLE exam and therefore the preparation course. The recognised medical schools may be found on this list: <https://imed.faimer.org>

6. What are the English Language Requirements for USMLE?

Students must have IELTS 6.0 or Kaplan International Colleges English test at Advanced level or equivalent on entry to the USMLE course in New Zealand. For courses in the US, students must have IELTS 5.5 or the equivalent. The reason for the difference is that in New Zealand, students do not have to sit the Step 2CS exam, which is primarily based on communication skills. In the US as this is compulsory, they get additional language training during their course and it is tested during the Step 2CS exam.

7. What is the length of study for the USMLE courses in New Zealand?

- Step 1: 6 months
- Step 2 CK: 6 months
- Step 3 Study Skills: 4 months

8. How many hours per week are the courses?

The USMLE preparation courses are full time, and students are required to study 20 hours per week at the centre. Students must maintain their attendance in a log book at the centre to meet the immigration requirements of 80% minimum.

9. Where are the classes held?

Each Kaplan International Colleges centre is equipped with a USMLE Preparation Room. Students will have access to specially outfitted computers with full access to Kaplan Medical's extensive examination preparation material as well as the Personal Learning System (PLS).

10. What hours are the students in class?

All the USMLE Steps are designed for individual study and are self-guided which allows students to learn at their own pace and ensure that they are confident in each area before proceeding to the next (please note that the student is not in a classroom setting). Students are required to study 20 hours per week at Kaplan International Colleges either in the USMLE Preparation Room or in our Kaplan International Colleges Study Centre. The Kaplan International Colleges Study Centre is self-access centre for language students. However, some USMLE students may use the facilities as well – to review English skills, to access newspapers/magazines or to use Kaplan International Colleges's online learning resources (www.kaplanaspect.net).

11. What material do students use to prepare for USMLE?

For each Step, students are provided access to Kaplan Medical's USMLE preparation material, PLS and lecture notes. Q-bank is also included in the fee.

12. What is the Personal Learning System PLS?

The Personal Learning System (PLS) is a revolutionary online course component designed to ensure that you fully understand the review material as you progress through the disciplines. Following each chapter in the lecture notes, the PLS will produce a quiz or assessment test. PLS will then pinpoint the remediation required, and will generate mini online lectures and direct you to specific page numbers to go back and review – all according to your specific weaknesses demonstrated by your performance. In addition, you will also receive performance feedback by organ system, discipline, topic, sub-topic and physician task.

13. What is Q-bank?

With more than 2,400 challenging questions, Step 1 Q-bank is a question-based course that you can use to test your content understanding. This online course offers you the most innovative features available that include our Score Estimator and even more exam-like content. In addition, the reKap feature provides summarized high-yield review related to each questions. Create customized tests by organ system or discipline or track your performance with our score comparison feature that can only be found on Kaplan Medical's Step 1 Q-bank. This Q-bank also includes Kaplan's 150-question diagnostic test with performance analysis.

Q-bank Plus

Q-bank Plus for Step 1 includes the Step 1 Q-bank, Integrated Vignettes Q-bank and a full length simulated exam. With 6 months of access, this course is perfect as a supplement to center-based courses, or as a stand-alone course for question-based review. For more information, check out this website: http://www.kaplanmedical.com/Medical_Licensing/Qbank/qbank-central.html

14. If students have a question about the course, where can they get help?

Staff members are available to support students while they are preparing for USMLE exams. If students have any questions at all or need assistance with medical and specific course related issues, they can contact our staff at Kaplan Medical at medfeedback@kaplan.com. Students will receive a response within 24 hours. The main person handling these enquiries is Leslie Manley, PhD. She is the Director for Step 1 curriculum in Kaplan. Questions about Steps 2 & 3 will be handled by the Associate Director of Medical Curriculum.

15. Why should I study the preparation course with Kaplan International Colleges instead of just doing my own on-line study with the Kaplan medical resources that I can purchase myself?

The online resources do not have nearly as many hours of recorded lectures as the full package, so there is not as much content to assist in the exam preparation. Also, the lectures are not streamed – they look like power-point slides with audio and just a picture of the lecturer. In addition, if they study at Kaplan International Colleges New Zealand or US centres, they can receive additional assistance through USMLE advisors and can study in an academic setting.

16. How can I still prepare successfully with the USMLE preparation in New Zealand, even though there is no live lecture component to the course?

Many students prefer the flexibility that our course offers. As long as they maintain their attendance of 80% or more and complete the minimum required of 20 hours per week in the study centre, there is a high degree of flexibility offered that live lectures would not offer, eg students are able to work 20 hours per week during their course. If students were locked in to a live lecture schedule, they would not be able to enjoy this flexibility. Students also have the additional support of having access to the Kaplan Medical support staff via email with questions replied to within 24 hours.

17. Do the students have access to other Kaplan International Colleges services?

Students have full-access to all Kaplan International Colleges facilities such as accommodation, activities and general student welfare support and can ask our staff on site for more information at any time.

18. Where do students take the USMLE exams?

- Step 1: Auckland, NEW ZEALAND
- Step 2 CK: Auckland, NEW ZEALAND
- Step 2 CS: USA (5 Centres: Atlanta, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Philadelphia)
- Step 3: USA (Kaplan Medical Testing Centres)

19. How much do the exams cost – in 2009?

- Step 1: US\$710 plus US \$130 international fee to sit the exam in Auckland
- Step 2 CK: US\$710 plus US \$145 international fee to sit the exam in Auckland
- Step 2 CS: US\$1200 (must be taken in the US; therefore no international fee)
- Step 3: US\$690

20. How often are the exams held?

USMLE Step 1 and Step 2 CK exams are offered every week in Auckland at a Prometric test centre located at:

ITTI Ltd - Information Technology Training Institute
111 Apirana Avenue, P O Box 18023, Glen Innes, Auckland

Phone +6495288224

These exams are available Monday to Thursday. USMLE Step 2 CS and Step 3 exams must be taken in the USA.

21. How do students book the exams?

For USMLE Step 1 and Step 2 CK, students book the exam through the Prometric website: <http://www.prometric.com>. Students also pay for the exams through the website. For USMLE Step 2 CS and Step 3, students can receive our expert support through Kaplan Medical in booking these examinations. Please enquire at the centre for more details.

22. How long does it take to get the exam results?

Normally it would take 3-4 weeks to obtain the USMLE results.

23. What is considered a pass in Step 1 or Step 2CK?

The minimum score in NEW ZEALAND for a pass is 185 (or roughly 75%). To get a residence in US, candidates need at least 220 (or approximately 90%).

24. How do I interpret the scores? Why are their 2 figures listed as the passing score?

Essentially, the USMLE is a scaled examination – this means that the number of questions answered correctly does not always equate to a specific 2-digit score. While the 2-digit score of 75 is somewhat similar to a percentile, it is NOT a percentile equivalent of the score.

The most accurate score is the 3-digit score, which is what most residency programs in the US refer to. For more detailed information about the scoring, please refer to this website:

http://www.usmle.org/General_Information/general_information_FAQs.html#score

25. Can students re-sit the exams to get a higher score?

Students cannot re-sit the exams to get a higher score, but they can re-sit the exams if they have failed (although residency directors can see their history). They do not need to redo the course to re-sit the exam if they fail.

26. For students who have taken Step 1 and Step 2 CK in New Zealand, what type of visa is required if students want to take the Step 3 exam in the USA?

Students may come into the USA on a Visitor's Visa to take the exam. The exams are a maximum of 2 days. If they choose to take the preparation course in the US, they would need to apply for a student visa. Please check with the US immigration if you can apply for this visa in New Zealand or if you need to return home first.

27. In the US, Step 1 and Step 2CK are valid for 7 years. How long are USMLE scores considered valid in New Zealand?

The term of validity between US and New Zealand USMLE are different. If students wish to register in New Zealand, their USMLE Step 1 and Step 2CK scores must have been obtained within the last 5 years.

28. Do I have to take the exams in a particular order?

Step 2 CK is normally taken after Step 1, but some doctors who have been practicing medicine for a while will do Step 2 CK first (this is because it is more related to the practical applications of medical theory). Step 3 must be taken last.

29. What do I need to do after completing Step 1 and 2CK to work as a doctor in New Zealand?

The next stage is to sit the NZREX exam. Students must have passed USMLE with a three-digit score of 185. They must sit the NZREX exam within five years of achieving the USMLE pass. If they plan to get a residency in the US, they would need at least a score of a three-digit score of 220. Most overseas doctors* need to pass the New Zealand Registration examination (NZREX) to obtain registration with the Medical Council of New Zealand.

* Overseas doctors with medical degree qualifications from New Zealand, Australia, UK or the Republic of Ireland do not need take USMLE to be become a registered doctor in NZ.

** We highly recommend that those candidates who aim to practise in NZ have graduated from a medical university and have at least 3-5 years work experience. The reason for this is because there is much more competition for 1st year residency positions because of the number of NZ medical graduates being produced each year.

30. What are the entry requirements to sit the NZREX exam?

Students need to have completed Step 1 and Step 2CK (see question above about these scores being valid for 5 years in New Zealand) AND they need to have IELTS 7.5 in speaking and listening and 7.0 in reading and writing. IELTS is the only English exam that is recognized for entry to this exam.

31. How do I apply to sit the NZREX exam?

NZREX Clinical Exam is held three times per year:

Exam date	27 March 2010	26 June 2010	18 September 2010
Closing date for applications:	5 February 2010	7 May 2010	30 July 2010

The 2010 fees for NZREX Clinical are NZ\$3,750.00 (incl GST). Students apply for entry to this exam by completing the attached application form [NZREX Application](#) and submitting it to the New Zealand Medical Council in Wellington.

32. How do I prepare for the NZREX exam?

There is not a preparation programme for NZREX. However, the NZ Medical Council has provided Sample Questions and a Reading List to help candidates prepare. Both of these may be downloaded from their website at:

<http://www.mcnz.org.nz/Registration/NZREXClinicalExamination/NZREXClinicalFrequentlyAskedQuestions/FAQAnswersApplyingtositNZREXClinical/tabid/254/Default.aspx#7>

33. What is considered a pass on NZREX? What is the pass rate?

The examination result will reflect your overall clinical competence. You will be marked as 'competent' or 'not yet competent'. Domains of subject matter will not be marked separately, grades will not be given and there will be no partial passes. Historically the pass rate for NZREX has averaged around 50%.

34. On successful passing of the NZREX exam, how do I get my one-year residency or internship?

All new graduates and NZREX graduates are known as interns, and they will have a nominated intern supervisor for the first 12 months working in New Zealand. You must work under supervision in an approved position for at least 12 months after passing NZREX Clinical. During this time you will be registered within a provisional general scope of practice and your work will be assessed. This is similar to the internship that New Zealand graduates must do after they graduate. During this time you will get used to working in the New Zealand health system and, in addition, acquire the necessary skills expected by the New Zealand public. Your supervisors will report to the Council on your performance, and when you reach the required standard (usually after 12 months) you will be registered in a general scope of practice and will no longer be required to work under supervision. At that time you will be able to either prepare for specialist training, or to complete the requirements for registration as a specialist if this is what you wish to do. Work is not guaranteed for doctors who have passed the examination. You will have to apply directly to the District Health Boards [\[NEW ZEALAND DHBs\]](#) for work. The DHBs are familiar with the Council's requirements for NZREX graduates.

There are private organizations which help graduates secure internships. Should we mention those?

Here's the link: <http://www.mcnz.org.nz/Links/Medicalrecruitmentagencies/tabid/140/Default.aspx>

35. How long does it usually take for a successful NZREX graduate to be offered the 12-month internship after applying to the District of Health Boards for work? Is the competition for residency as tough as in the US?

It depends on each District Health Board, but normally it would take around 3 months. Residency applications are more competitive in the Auckland area. Students who apply to DHBs outside of Auckland (i.e. Christchurch, Dunedin, Nelson) will have a greater opportunity to be placed and in a timely manner. Recently, there has been a decrease in the number of NZREX applicants applying for residency positions in New Zealand, so this means that students should not have to wait more than 3 months to be placed into a residency position if they apply for positions outside of the Auckland area. In New Zealand, the process of applying for and securing a residency is much less complicated and is far less competitive than in the US.

36. On completion of this one year of internship, how do I apply for full General Registration?

Registration is a two step process:

Step 1:

- Complete the application form, attach your documents and fee and send it to your employer.
- Your employer will complete the application and send it to the Council office.
- You need to allow 20 working days from when your completed application for registration is received, until the application can be processed. If your application is incomplete or does not satisfy the requirements processing will take longer.

Step 2:

- A letter will be sent asking you to attend a registration interview where you will be required to produce your original documents and pay the practising certificate fee.
- Once the documents from this interview have been received in the Council office, and they have been checked for completion, you will be issued with an annual practising certificate and you can then start work.
- You need to allow five working days for your annual practising certificate to be issued.

Please note there is also an Application for Registration Fee of NZ\$425.

37. Does my practicing certificate need to be renewed every year?

Yes, all doctors in New Zealand must renew their practicing certificate each year. Reminders to renew certificates are sent out to all certified doctors. The fee varies from NZ\$320-800.

38. What is a typical salary for a registrar or doctor in New Zealand?

Seniority	Approximate Basic Salary (NZ\$)	Estimated Salary After Average Overtime (NZ\$)
Resident/ SHO	70,000	85,000
Registrar	85,000	100,000
General Practitioner	100,000 - 150,000	130,000 - 180,000
Consultant (Specialist)	150,000 - 230,000	180,000 - 260,000

For more information you may wish to check this website: www.imrmedical.com/nzsalaries.htm

39. After completing my year-long residency with a District Health Board in New Zealand and obtained my General Registration, how do I then train in a particular area to become a specialist in my chosen field of interest?

After getting their general scope of practise, doctors then need to secure a job in the vocational area that they choose (Remember: easier to do outside of Auckland. Candidates will need to apply again to DHBs directly in their specified field). They will work 12-18 months supervised (+ paid, possibly at a higher wage). Upon completing their supervised vocational work, they can be considered for approval for vocational scope. They have another option as well – instead of doing the supervised work for 12-18 months, they can study at university for an approved Australasian post-grad qualification in that area. Once they've completed the qualification, then they may register through the New Zealand Medical Council for vocational scope.

40. How do I check if I am eligible to apply for my specialist registration through the vocational scope?

Newly registered overseas trained doctors must work under supervision within a [provisional vocational scope](#) (12-18 months) before they can be considered for registration within a vocational scope, and who during that time have completed Council's requirements for vocational scope.

OR

Doctors who have already registered in New Zealand and have been approved for a general scope AND hold an [approved Australasian post-graduate qualification](#) may be registered with Vocational Scope. The required New Zealand Medical Council criteria for a provisional scope of practice include the following:

- Graduation with appropriate qualifications from a university medical school in:
 - New Zealand
 - Australia

United Kingdom
Republic of Ireland

OR

The practice of medicine in a health system similar to New Zealand in one of the following countries for 36 of the 48 months prior to application (must have worked for a minimum of 30 hours per week):

Australia
UK
Republic of Ireland
Canada
United States of America
The Netherlands
Germany

AND

Have passed the NZREX Clinical within the last five years

41. When is it possible to apply for a Permanent Residency PR visa?

Medical professionals who have successfully passed the NZREX Clinical and hold a job offer form a New Zealand DHB and have the required experience for that position are eligible to apply for a Skilled Migrant Category Visa. As of printing (August 2009), many medical professions are listed on the NZ Immigration website as a Long Term Skill Shortage. If you meet NZIS's requirements you will be issued either a Work to Residence or Residence Visa.

Alternatively, if you have just completed your medical degree and have not completed your initial residency period in your country (i.e. you have no practical work experience in the medical field), you must apply for a Work Permit.

For full details on the application process and for more information on obtaining residence status in NZ, please visit the NZIS website: <http://www.immigration.govt.nz/migrant/stream/work/skilledmigrant/>.

42. If a student wishes to transfer to Australia on completion of the USMLE exams, is it possible for them to work there with this qualification?

It is possible for USMLE graduates to transfer to Australia, but they would need to have completed their internship residency in New Zealand first. Basically, most USMLE grads would be eligible for the 'Competent Authority Pathway' which would exempt them from having to take the AMC MCQ or clinical examinations, but they must have completed at least 2 years residency and still have to undertake workplace-based assessment while working under supervision in Australia before being fully qualified. Also, to be eligible for this pathway, USMLE Steps 1, 2 AND 3 must be completed. Alternatively, the NZREX is accepted in Australia, but only if the 12-month rotations have been completed. For more information on this topic, please check the Australian Medical Council Website:

<http://www.amc.org.au/index.php/img#ca>; <http://www.amc.org.au/index.php/img/faqs/ca>

For more information on USMLE in New Zealand, please contact: newzealand@kaplan.com