

## How Foreign Health Care Workers Can Obtain A Social Security Number

*by John R. Wilson, Esq. Goff and Wilson, P.A.*

**Q:** I am a foreign health care worker and I want to obtain a Social Security number. Can I?

**A.** When and how to obtain a Social Security number are very hot topics for those persons arriving in the US who want to work.

The argument travels the following path: The employer is required to obtain a social security number from all employees before placing them on the payroll; the Social Security Administration (SSA) is required to obtain proof that the foreigner is in the country legally and authorized to work in the form of an Employment Card (EAD), green card (alien registration card) or other acceptable proof; and the foreigner needs a social security number in order to register for taking the Board of Nursing qualifying exams and other such exams in the particular health care field. Each agency says it needs proof from the other and they are all inter-dependent.

Now, some states will allow the health care professional to sit for exams without the social security number, while other states will allow the issuance of a special number only for purposes of the exam. Once the foreign health care professional has qualified to practice in that field, then s/he can apply for work authorization and once obtained, can apply for a social security number.

However, the foreigner is not out of the woods yet since the application to SSA for a number can take four to six weeks before issuance. Meanwhile, the employer can't hire the nurse, doctor, medical technologist, etc. Presently, there is no way around this issue. With the strict security measures in place now for issuance of all visas and admittance of foreigners, the SSA has been forced to tighten its control on the issuance of numbers.

A helpful site on the social security number and how to obtain it is [www.ssa.gov/immigration](http://www.ssa.gov/immigration). There you can navigate to find out additional information. Also, we advise applicants in the health care field to refer to the licensing board in their particular specialty as to requirements for social security numbers.

In conclusion, no one is authorized to employ a foreigner without a social security number and in most cases, a foreigner needs a social security number in order to enroll in the licensing exams for the intended state of employment. ■

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*John R. Wilson, Esq., has been in active practice for the last 20 years, focusing on immigration law. Please submit comments or additional questions directly to John Wilson, Goff and Wilson, P.A., PO Box 347, Concord, NH 03302-0347. You can also reach him at (800) 717-8472 or [jwilson@goffandwilson.com](mailto:jwilson@goffandwilson.com).*

*Goff & Wilson*

