

# Immigrant Workforce Resilience

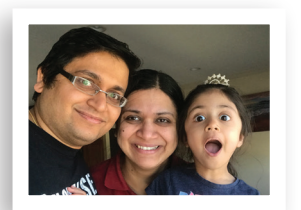
UnityPoint Health employs around 80 physicians on temporary visas waiting for green cards. These physicians provide vital care in your communities. They are caring for your family, friends and neighbors and are active, contributing community members. Their stories are engaging and full of hope. At UnityPoint Health, people are our sweet spot. Our patients and our team members. They're what we care about most, and why we do what we do.

As part of our federal action list, we are advocating for these amazing physicians and we need your support for immigrant workforce resilience. To remedy the administrative backlog of temporary visas, we strongly encourage the passage of S.1024, the Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act.



## Shriram Lokare, M.D.

Shriram Lokare, M.D. is a UnityPoint Health Rheumatologist serving patients in Peoria, Illinois. He has been waiting for permanent residency for 6 years. He and his wife are actively involved in many programs around their community and care deeply about supporting others. They are the parents of a 5-year-old daughter who will soon be starting kindergarten and is an American citizen by birth. He hopes that permanent residency for health care professionals can soon be expedited so that they can focus on their families and patients instead.



### Why is the issue of permanent residency important to you?

Health care professionals are an essential part of the fabric of American society and provide invaluable service to their communities. Faster permanent residency for health care professionals would give confidence to both immigrant health care professionals and their employers. When a doctor leaves a job, patients can be left stranded and it can overburden that hospital to provide adequate and timely care to these patients. I am one of only five Rheumatologists in the entire city of Peoria. Before I joined the hospital in 2015, UnityPoint Health spent 10 years trying to fill my position. Despite the subspecialty expertise I have and the valuable service I provide, I have been in EB2 category for permanent residency since 2015. **With the current backlog and wait times for EB2 category, it may take more than few decades to achieve permanent residency.**

## KEY STATISTICS

- ★ 78 UnityPoint Health physicians are currently on H1B status.
- ★ In 2019, more than 95,000 UnityPoint Clinic visits occurred with these physicians. About every 1 in 10 clinic visits that year.
- ★ They practice in 12 medical specialties as well as in family medicine, internal medicine and pediatrics.
- ★ These specialists serve in the critical areas of pulmonology, infectious disease and hospitalist care which were vital during COVID-19. They provided care for 39% of clinic Pulmonology visits in 2019 and 36% of Infectious Disease visits. More than 25 of our hospitalists are on H1B visa status.

For more information about UnityPoint Health's position on Immigrant Workforce Resilience, please contact:

- » Cathy Simmons, Executive Director of Government & External Affairs at [cathy.simmons@unitypoint.org](mailto:cathy.simmons@unitypoint.org)
- » Stephanie Collingwood, Government Relations Specialist at [stephanie.collingwood2@unitypoint.org](mailto:stephanie.collingwood2@unitypoint.org)

*“If something were to happen to me, I worry about what would happen to my family as well as the thousands of patients I care for who could face barriers to receiving the care they need.”*

### What worries you most related to temporary visa restrictions/implications?

Due to the visitor visa restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, many health care professionals with young children have no one to support their children while these professionals are working long hours. In the peak of the pandemic in 2020, even day care centers were closed creating a large issue for the care of children of essential workers. **It would bring a big mental relief to doctors if their family members were able to visit the United States and stay for extended duration to help with the childcare.**

### Why did you go into medicine, specifically rheumatology?

A Rheumatologist deals with diseases which could, and very often do, involve almost any bodily system. It requires a broad perspective and knowledge base. Therefore, rheumatological diseases often represent an intellectual challenge from diagnosis all the way through treatment. Such opportunities to exercise my knowledge of medicine and make a long-lasting impact on patients and their families have attracted me the most to Rheumatology. It gives me immense satisfaction to help improve quality of life of patients who are affected with immunologically complex and lifelong painful diseases. **I truly believe, when we help a patient, we are helping their families and the life around them.**

