



Medical Residents' View of Recruitment and Job Prospects after Graduation

February 2014

While many Canadians cannot find a family doctor or face long queues to see a medical specialist, an increasing number of new medical graduates are struggling to find employment.

The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada's 2013 employment study showed that 16% of newly certified medical specialists and subspecialists reported being unable to secure employment.¹ Employment challenges seemed to increase over 2011 and 2012, especially for new physicians in surgical and other resource-intensive disciplines. Many new graduates reported that they were pursuing additional training to become more employable, while a large number of those who did find employment were working as locum tenens or in part-time positions.

Along similar lines, the 2013 National Physician Survey (NPS) found that 6% of Canadian physicians reported being either underemployed or unemployed, with the highest rates of under-employment or unemployment among the youngest age group.² The NPS noted that under-employment and unemployment rates varied by specialty, ranging from 30.8% to 1.2%. Critical care specialists had the highest rates of reported under-employment and unemployment. High rates of underemployment and unemployment were also reported in resource-intensive specialties such as cardiovascular and thoracic surgery, general surgery, orthopedic surgery, nuclear medicine, and gastroenterology.

In addressing the employment challenges faced by new graduates, Resident Doctors of Canada (RDoC)

has sought to understand resident views about future job opportunities and recruitment preferences.

Methodology

As part of a study on physician Health Human Resources (HHR), RDoC included questions on HHR in its 2013 National Resident Survey. The survey questions were put in the field between March 19 and May 1, 2013. RDoC members* were contacted by e-mail and invited to take part in the online National Resident Survey. A total of 1,975 members responded, resulting in a participation rate of 22.8%.

HHR-related questions included asking residents about their confidence in finding a job, career options if the resident could not find a job, and interest in proposed programs connecting new graduates and retiring physicians.

Results

Confidence in finding employment after residency

Residents were asked about their level of confidence in finding employment in their specialty within Canada after residency. Responses varied by specialty and year of residency but were fairly consistent in the 2012 and 2013 National Resident Surveys.

In the 2013 cohort of survey respondents, 1.4% of family medicine residents expressed some degree of non-confidence (they indicated that they were either "not confident" or "somewhat not confident") in finding employment upon graduation. However, 23.2% of residents in medical specialties and 48.4% of residents in surgical specialties expressed some degree of non-confidence in their employment prospects.

* RDoC members include Canadian resident physicians who train outside of Québec. Resident physicians in Québec are under the jurisdiction of the Québec medical resident organization, la Fédération des médecins résidents du Québec (FMRQ).

Figure 1. How confident are you about your prospects of finding employment in your specialty within Canada upon completion of your residency? (n=1,975)

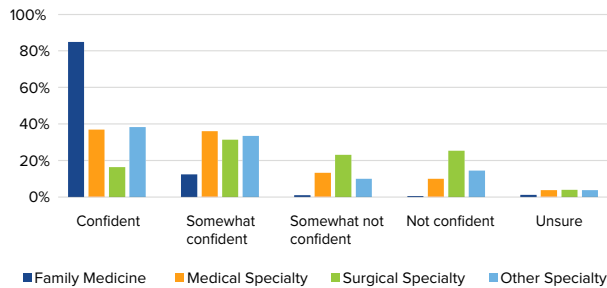
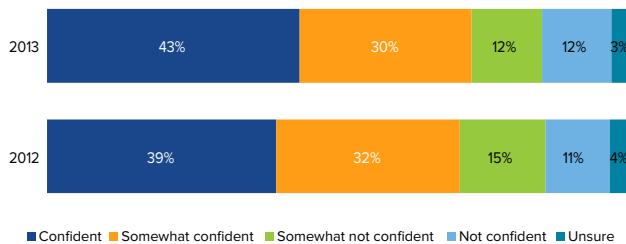


Figure 2. How confident are you about your prospects of finding employment in your specialty within Canada upon completion of your residency? (n=1,975)



Fellowship training

When asked about fellowship training, almost half of respondents indicated that they intended to do a fellowship following residency training or were currently enrolled in fellowship training. Residents in a surgical specialty were most likely (61.1%) to be planning on a fellowship. Younger medical residents (age 25 years and under), male residents, and graduates from Canadian medical schools were also more likely to be considering a fellowship.

When asked about the motivation for their decision to undertake a fellowship, 30.3% of residents cited future employment and career goals, 24.3% had a personal interest in doing the fellowship, and 22.7% wanted more training, skills, or specialization. In contrast, among family medicine residents planning to undertake or currently enrolled in a third year of specialized family medicine training, 31.5% were pursuing additional training for personal interest or enjoyment,

31.8% wanted more training, skills or specialization, and 28.9% cited future employment or career goals.

Alternative options if acceptable job not found

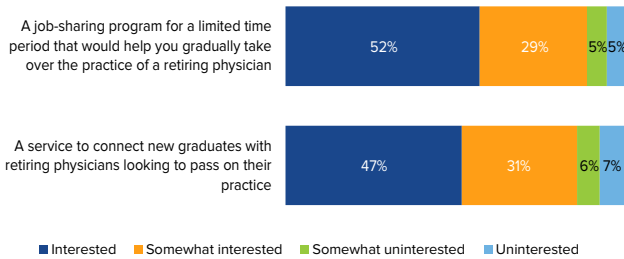
Residents were asked about what options they would consider if they did not find an acceptable position. Approximately 30% of respondents indicated that they would seek employment in another province and 28.4% would continue to seek employment within the province in which they were trained. A further 16.8% indicated that they would seek employment outside of Canada, while 22.3% of residents reported that they would continue with training.

When asked whether they would be willing to relocate for a job, 88.0% of respondents indicated their willingness to move to a large urban or suburban centre if they knew there were jobs available in that location within Canada. Two-thirds of respondents (66.5%) were willing to relocate to an inner-city location, with surgical residents being the most willing (94.1%) to relocate to a large urban or suburban centre. Residents in surgical or other specialties were the most willing to relocate (71.6% and 73.3% respectively) to an inner-city location. More than half of respondents (52.1%) were willing to relocate to a rural or small town location for a job, with family medicine residents more likely to say they would be willing to relocate to a rural or small town location (71.5%). Overall, 20.5% of respondents indicated that they were willing to relocate to a geographically isolated location. Family medicine residents were the most willing (35.7%) to relocate to a geographically isolated or remote location in Canada if there were jobs available there. Practice pattern preferences may reflect resident perceptions of health infrastructure and support in geographically isolated or remote sites.

Transition into independent practice

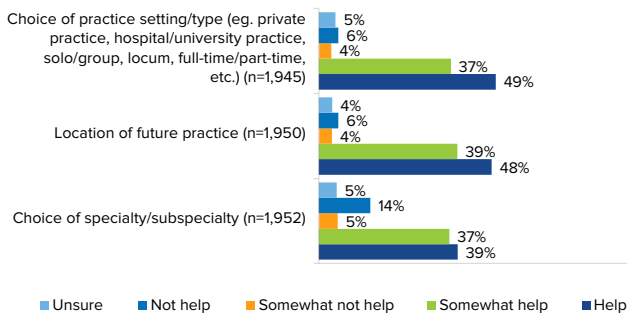
Residents were asked about their interest in a service connecting new graduates with retiring physicians looking to pass on their practice, as well as their interest in a job-sharing program that would allow new graduates to gradually take over the practice of a retiring physician. Overall, 78.2% of

Figure 4. When transitioning to independent practice, would you be interested in...



respondents indicated that they would be at least somewhat interested in a service connecting new graduates with retiring physicians; interest was greatest among residents in surgical specialties (87.9%). Most respondents (80.9%) indicated that they would be at least somewhat interested in a job-sharing program for a limited time period that would help them gradually transition into the practice of a retiring physician.

Figure 3. If you were given information on areas of need and job trends across Canada, how would this information help guide your career planning, if at all, in terms of the following:



Bottom Line

- A large number of Canadian medical residents, particularly in surgical subspecialties, lack confidence in their job prospects coming out of residency.
- Residents would consider various options if they cannot find a job that is acceptable to them upon the completion of their residency training.
- These options include undertaking further training, relocating to another part of the country, or seeking work outside of Canada.
- Residents across all training years and specialties indicate that more information about the job market and the demand for physicians would be useful for various aspects of education and career planning.
- Residents are interested in programs that would assist them in finding positions, either through job-sharing or being connected with a retiring physician looking to hand over a practice.

1 Fréchette D, Hollenberg D, Shrichand A, Jacob C, Datta I. What's really behind Canada's unemployed specialists? *Too many, too few doctors? Findings from the Royal College's employment study*. Ottawa: The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada;2013.

2 National Physician Survey. National Physician Survey 2013 Backgrounder. Available from http://nationalphysiciansurvey.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/OFFICIAL-RELEASE_NPS-2013-Backgrounder_EN.pdf