Principles on Entry Disciplines and Framework for Medical Education Reform

Resident Doctors of Canada Practice Committee
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Background and Purpose

The number of entry disciplines (the training programs medical students enter at the start of residency) for postgraduate medical students in Canada has increased steadily since the 1950s. Today, the number of disciplines and subspecialties available to postgraduate trainees includes 29 Royal College specialties, 36 subspecialties, and 16 diploma areas, as well as 19 areas of enhanced skills in Family Medicine. Entry disciplines have a profound societal impact within health care, where resident doctors serve a dual role as both postgraduate trainees and health care providers. The mix of disciplines ultimately guides the supply of physicians in different specialties and locations.

The current system of entry disciplines does not produce a physician workforce that best serves the needs of Canadian patients. In particular, postgraduate medical education (PGME) curricula – and specifically, clinical rotations – have become increasingly focused on specialization, whereas generalism and versatility is required to optimally serve the needs of Canadians. Graduates may therefore not be equipped with the diversity of skills and experiences they need to serve in locations and settings where they are most needed.

To promote a training system that produces the right mix, type and distribution of physicians to keep the Canadian healthcare system functioning as efficiently as possible. With these suggested principles, RDoC believes that the mix of PGME entry disciplines, and their ability to serve the needs of the Canadian healthcare system, must be continually re-evaluated to ensure they are aligned with societal and patient needs, adequate generalism skills, and practice and career flexibility.

Conclusion

For more detailed background on these issues and the complete set of calls to action, our position paper “Principles on Entry Disciplines and Framework for Medical Education Reform” can be downloaded at residentdoctors.ca.