

March 31, 2020

Dr. Susan Moffatt-Bruce
Chief Executive Officer
Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada
774 Echo Drive
Ottawa, Ontario
K1S 5N8

Dear Dr. Moffatt-Bruce,

We are members of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada who oppose the RCPSC's proposal to defer scheduled spring 2020 examinations to the autumn of 2020.

We hereby submit a formal request for a special meeting of the members (under article 10.2 of bylaw 20) to discuss the following resolutions:

- 1) That the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, rather than deferring scheduled spring 2020 examinations to the autumn of 2020, shall instead create an alternative one-time path to certification for those candidates who were scheduled to sit the spring 2020 examinations.
- 2) That this one-time process shall consist of an assessment of resident in-training evaluations (possibly in the form of a summary prepared by the Program Director) with or without a written examination delivered electronically in a massively distributed fashion (i.e. on the candidates' own computers) with appropriate invigilation prior to June 30, 2020.
- 3) That, in the event that the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada is unable to adequately conduct the assessment process described above, all candidates who had registered for the spring examinations shall be formally certified in the specialties to which they had registered for examinations as if they had passed those examinations (i.e. with no subsequent requirement for make-up examinations).

We agree that holding traditional oral examinations in the spring of 2020 is not feasible. Physicians, hospitals, and academic institutions have had to make radical changes to usual practices, and we think that regulators should be ready to act likewise. Deferring the examinations to the autumn in order to maintain traditional examination processes will cause real and serious harms to examination candidates and to the health care system in a time of crisis. Graduating residents will not be able to work at near normal efficiency when they are focused on examinations at

unpredictable dates. Residents in further training will have to plan additional travel back for examinations, and all residents will be faced with several extra months of studying to maintain peak “book knowledge” during an unprecedented pandemic.

Regulators in worse-affected countries have taken radical action. Italy, Spain, and Great Britain have licensed graduating medical students en masse. Many provinces are returning retired nurses to work without formal skills assessment and fast tracking licenses for retired physicians. Residents who are completing Royal College accredited programs have the skills and knowledge necessary to practice in their respective specialties.

Oral examinations in the spring of 2020 would, absent the pandemic, be feasible, but we have concern for the impact on trainees during the pandemic. Adapting the traditional written examination to an online process is practicable, including invigilation, but adapting the oral examination to an online process may be more challenging. Furthermore, candidates following social distancing protocols can likely prepare more effectively for a written examination than for an oral examination. An electronically-delivered written examination is the most pragmatic approach to supplementing an assessment of in-training evaluations.

Certification of candidates without an examination process must be the next option if adaptation of the written examination to an online format is not possible. Throughout the course of their Royal College-accredited training, residents accumulate substantial evaluation portfolios in the form of ITERs, presentations, and direct observation (among other things) that provide adequate evidence of their competence to practice independently.

We should trust our applicants from accredited programs, and our accreditation process. A modified examination pathway is the proper way forward. We are all making more radical changes in our work than the one that we propose that you undertake, to create an alternative one-time path to certification for those candidates who were scheduled to sit the spring 2020 examinations.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John David Neary". The signature is fluid and cursive, starting with a tall, thin vertical stroke on the left and ending with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke on the right.

John David Neary MD FRCPC (Hamilton, Ontario; Royal College member)
and 2580 other signers (see attached spreadsheet)