

Canada's Newly Certified Medical Specialists Struggle to Find Work

OTTAWA, May 1, 2019 – A study based on a multi-year survey of 6,200 specialists released today by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada revealed the highest percentage of reported employment challenges since the launch of the Royal College Employment Survey in 2011. Nineteen percent of newly certified medical and surgical specialists were not able to find work immediately in their specialty following completion of their training in 2017.

“Difficulties in placing newly graduated specialists into full-time jobs are a great loss for both patients and the specialists,” says Dr. Andrew Padmos, chief executive officer at the Royal College.

When asked to identify what they perceived to be the barriers to their immediate employment, survey respondents noted

- The scarcity of positions in their particular specialty in Canada
- Limited information on job opportunities
- Family obligations
- Lack of available health care resources (e.g. operating-room time, hospital beds)
- The delayed retirement of senior physicians and surgeons

Since the Royal College began gathering this data in 2011, between 14% and 19% of new specialists have reported problems finding employment right after they have been certified.

The good news is that 61% of new specialists who reported employment challenges at the time of certification had secured a clinical position by the time they received the Follow-Up Survey (12-17 months post-certification).

“It would be easy to jump to the conclusion that Canada has an oversupply of specialists,” says Danielle Fréchette, executive director of the Royal College’s Office of Research, Health Policy and Advocacy. “We have more research to do, but there are a number of factors that seem to be contributing to this worrisome trend.” Fréchette suggests that solutions lie in better alignment in the planning of workforce requirements and health care needs, and ensuring that information is more readily shared about available job opportunities.

Fréchette is one of several authors who analyzed years of data (2011-2017) and produced the report *Employment Patterns of Canada’s Newly Certified Medical Specialists: Findings from the Royal College Employment Study* that was released today.

The report also revealed that year over year, between 42% and 51% of survey respondents are continuing with further training after completing their certification exam. While this is a



popular and immediate option for a high proportion of respondents, many also report they are pursuing even more specialized training to enhance their long-term employment prospects.

Survey data from 2017 continues to show that employment challenges are most pronounced in surgical and more resource-intensive specialties. Specialists in Neurosurgery and Radiation Oncology have been hardest hit over the last seven years of data collection, followed closely by those in Orthopedic Surgery and Nuclear Medicine.

Workforce planning by provincial-territorial governments is currently focused mostly on aligning physician supply with the health care needs of society. “While this is critical, it is also equally important to consider the availability of practice resources, such as operating room time, staff and beds, when addressing issues related to access to employment,” says Fréchette.

The full report and a media backgrounder are available at:
<http://www.royalcollege.ca/rcsite/health-policy/employment-study-e>

The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada is the national professional association that oversees the medical education of specialists in Canada. We accredit the university programs that train resident physicians for their specialty practices, and we administer the examinations that residents must pass to become certified as specialists. In collaboration with health organizations and government agencies, the Royal College also plays a role in developing sound health policy in Canada.

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