

Medicine

*Submitted by Jonathan DellaVedova
(President, Canadian Federation of Medical Students)*

THE CANADIAN FEDERATION OF MEDICAL STUDENTS

The Canadian Federation of Medical Students (CFMS) is the national representative body of medical students in Canada. Our membership includes over 7000 medical students pursuing their medical careers in 14 member schools from coast to coast. As an organization we provide specialized services, communication and representation to Canadian medical students.

Though our membership is diverse and distributed over a wide geographic area, we are a grassroots organization and our agenda is set by member input and member resolutions. We listen to the issues that are of concern to medical students and voice those concerns to the national medical organizations, faculties of medicine, the public, and government. In this way we work towards the betterment of our medical education and healthcare systems. At the same time, based on member input, we are always seeking out and acquiring discounts and services for our members such as travel, telecommunications, and educational materials. Our Global Health division is highly active, organizing exchanges for Canadian medical students and participating in exciting overseas health initiatives. Our publications include our growing Annual Review which has captured the attention of government and the national medical organizations.



The CFMS is led by an Executive Group consisting of a President, Past-President, five Vice Presidents responsible for different portfolios, and six Regional Representatives. The 14 individual medical student societies are each represented by two representatives who attend our Annual General Meeting in September and Biannual General Meeting in May and maintain contact with each other and the executive throughout the year. Our General Manager oversees our Ottawa office and carries out much of the day-to-day activity of the organization.

The Medical Profession in Canada

The route to a career in medicine begins with a general undergraduate education. All Canadian medical schools outside Quebec require 2-4 years of university education with various pre-requisites, and many require completion of the Medical College Admission Test as well. Entry is highly competitive into the 17 medical schools in Canada including 3 francophone schools in Quebec. The length of undergraduate medical education outside Quebec is 4 years with the exception of McMaster University and the University of Calgary which have 3-year programs. Generally, the first half of medical education is pre-clinical consisting of didactic and small-group learning while clinical experiences are gradually introduced. The latter half of medical school is called clerkship and consists of rotations through the various medical disciplines in the hospital and in the community.

Just before graduation, senior medical students participate in a matching process for entry into post-graduate medical education or “residency”. There are approximately 30 different specialties from which to choose including Family Medicine, Pediatrics, General Surgery, Internal Medicine, Psychiatry, Obstetrics/Gynecology and Emergency Medicine. Further sub-specialization is possible in many of these disciplines at a later stage of training. Residency programs can be anywhere from 2 years to 7 years in duration.

Medical trainees are licensed by both the Medical Council of Canada, and either the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada or the College of Family Physicians of Canada. Examinations take place at various stages of training. Throughout one’s career as a physician there are requirements to participate in Continuing Medical Education or Continuing Professional Development to keep knowledge and skills current.

Physicians are found in all aspects of the healthcare system in Canada. Family physicians are considered the main entry point into the system and are responsible for providing comprehensive and coordinated care for their patients. More specialized or emergent care is provided by a very wide range of specialists and sub-specialists who staff emergency rooms, operating rooms, specialty offices in the community, medical wards, labour and delivery wards, pediatric wards, public health units, community outreach clinics and many more.

Outside of clinical medicine, many career paths are available including medical education, medical research, administration, and advocacy. Nationally, the professional association of Canada’s physicians is the Canadian Medical Association and each province or territory has its own division as well.

A strong sustainable healthcare system in Canada depends on a vibrant medical profession and high quality medical education system. Though Canada is short on physicians, the profession is growing and increasingly committed to new avenues of collaboration to improve access and quality of care for all Canadians.