

The Integration of International Medical Graduates into the Physician Assistant Demonstration Project in Ontario, Canada

Physician Assistant Opportunities for International Medical Graduates

Authors:

M.B. Urowitz, MD, FRCP(C);
Arthur I. Rothman, EdD; Nadia Z.
Mikhael MD, FRCP(C), FCAP
Ministry of Health and Long-Term
Care Physician Assistant Team:
Joshua Tepper MD, Jeff Goodyear,
Jane Seltzer, Lynne Nagata

Results

International Medical Graduates were successfully integrated into the Ontario physician assistant demonstration project as a result of a rigorous selection process and mandatory participation in an integration program.

Background

In Ontario, the physician assistant (PA) role is being introduced through demonstration projects in hospitals, community health centres and diabetes and long-term care settings.

At the outset of the project, there were no civilian education programs for PAs in Canada. The PAs in the project were recruited from three sources:

1. PAs who were trained in the Canadian Forces.
2. PAs who were trained and certified in the United States.
3. Ontario International Medical Graduates (IMGs) who were assessed as possessing the competencies necessary to function in the Physician Assistant role.

Methods

Screening

IMGs were screened for required competencies using the following criteria:

1. The IMG had successfully completed Canada's national medical exams.
2. The IMG had scored at a level equivalent to a first year medical resident or higher on an Ontario clinical examination.

Selection

800 IMGs were invited to apply.

250 IMGs applied and were ranked based on exam scores, recency of practice and nature of experience.

85 IMGs were invited to a standardized interview to evaluate clinical experience, behavioural competencies and commitment to the project.

56 IMGs scored above 70% on the centralized interview and were invited to interview with the demonstration sites.

42 of the 44 IMGs who received PA job offers accepted positions.

Integration

The successful IMGs were required to complete a four-month integration program before starting clinical practice. The program had two parts:

1. Two months didactic education: six week classroom session, one week written examination and Advanced Cardiac Life support course, and one week orientation and administration.
2. A two-month clinical rotation at the site of employment.

Both parts had evaluative components, including written and clinical examinations.

Staff at the project sites also received a team integration workshop and print materials which discussed the roles of the team members and approaches to integrating a new provider role.

Outcome

Of the 42 IMGs in the demonstration project, three voluntarily withdrew during the integration program while 39 completed the integration program and began clinical practice as PAs. Three more IMGs have since withdrawn from clinical practice.

Project evaluation results will help inform whether we will continue to offer PA opportunities to IMGs in Ontario.

"I am able to provide patient and family education and support which contributes to enhanced patient satisfaction... I believe the PA role in Ontario will grow and PAs will certainly become an integral part of health system in Ontario."
Waheed-ur Rehman, Physician Assistant, Royal Victoria Hospital



"The Physician Assistant pilot project has been a great experience for me. I am not only learning a lot but I am also getting an opportunity to share my knowledge and skills with other health care professionals."
Jehan Zaib, Physician Assistant, Sault Area Hospital.

