

The unrecognized health human resource impact of Canadians studying medicine abroad (CSAs)

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Introduction:

While provincial health human resource planning regulates admission to medical schools in Canada, and federal citizenship and immigration regulates the number of immigrants to Canada, there are no regulations or policies that predict or accommodate the number of Canadian students who choose to study medicine abroad and then return to Canada for postgraduate training and practice.

Provincial governments have increased undergraduate and postgraduate positions in Canadian medical schools by more than 70%. Postgraduate positions have been increased not only to accommodate the increased enrolment but also to improve access for international medical graduates (IMGs). Despite these increases, the media and various think tank reports continue to identify shortages and predict physician shortages in the future. Also, the competition for available undergraduate positions remains unchanged despite the increase in positions. Therefore, many Canadians are seeking their medical education abroad.

Objectives:

- Describe the CSA cohort which comprises a recognizable and increasing subgroup of IMGs applying to the Canadian Resident Matching Service (CaRMS) for post graduate education.
- Identify the implications for health human resource planning.

Definitions and Design:

An IMG is any physician who has received their medical education from a non-Canadian medical school. CSAs are IMGs who have their Canadian citizenship, permanent resident status before entering a medical school abroad.

CaRMS studied the cohort of CSAs using a survey to over 3000 CSAs and site visits to a sample of schools concentrating on those that had known cohorts of Canadians.

On site interviews were conducted with groups of CSAs and with faculty.

Results:

- 1565 IMGs entered the CaRMS final match in 2011. 380 IMGs obtained positions
- About one third of the IMGs applying to postgraduate resident positions through the CaRMS process in 2011 were CSAs.
- It is estimated that there are over 3500 CSAs with the potential for 700 graduates per year.
- 1000 CSA's responded to the CaRMS survey out of a potential 3000 (33% response rate)
- The CSAs are predominantly from BC and Ontario and they are studying in over 80 medical schools in 30 countries.
- Males comprise 52.5% of the CSAs compared to 41.8% in Canada.

- CSAs are older (73.9% 26-30 yrs.) and more are single (83.1%) than Canadian medical students.
- More CSAs (21%) have physicians as parents.
- Some (5.9%) have entered from high school and 26.7% never applied to a Canadian medical school.
- When applying, they made fewer attempts (1.76) than the successful Canadian applicant (2.59).
- 90% state they wish to return to Canada for postgraduate education but see choice of discipline, return in service and the low success rate as major barriers.

Conclusion:

- There is a significant population of CSAs and who expect to return to Canada.
- Almost universally, their undergraduate university does not provide postgraduate education.
- Canadian programs are ill equipped to accommodate the increased numbers of IMGs in postgraduate education.
- CSAs comprise an annual graduate pool equivalent to 30% of the 2011 Canadian medical graduating class.
- The IMGs including the CSAs require specific policies to ensure that there is fair, transparent and equal access to needed educational programs.