

EXAMING FACTORS FOR SPECIALIST PHYSICIAN UNDER- AND UNEMPLOYMENT IN CANADA: A MIXED METHOD STUDY

D. Frechette¹, D. Hollenberg¹, G. Babitskaya¹,

¹Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, Ottawa, ON, CAN

There have been troubling signs in Canada that some newly certified medical specialists have had difficulties obtaining employment. The main objective of this longitudinal study is to examine the factors underlying specialist physician under/unemployment in Canada.

A mixed-method research design combining qualitative and quantitative approaches was applied. Fifty voluntary, confidential interviews were conducted with selected stakeholders including specialty and sub-specialty medicine committee chairs and program directors, senior hospital leaders, post-graduate deans, residents and recent graduates. Longitudinal quantitative survey data was also collected since 2011 through an online survey administered to every new Royal College specialty and sub-specialty certificant (N= 2002 in 2011 and N= 2231 in 2012 with response rates of 655(32.9%) and 713(31.9%) respectively).

Driving factors can be categorized into three main areas: (1) Economic: changing priorities and concomitant decreased spending have resulted in less hospital hiring and allocation of operating room time and resources; losses in investment portfolios have prompted some physicians to postpone their retirement; (2) Health System/Structural: increased reliance on residents by many hospitals to perform varying aspects of 'call service' and patient care reduces jobs previously open to new graduates; misalignment between needs-based provincial workforce plans and residency intake is resulting in some 'oversupply'; some compensation models for hospital-based specialist teams do not incentivize creation of new positions; certain interprofessional care models and changing scopes of practice among new and existing health professions have decreased the need for specialist positions by reducing duplication of clinical roles; (3) Individual/Contextual: influencers of work location of new graduates include desire to be in the same city as spouse/partner and family members, and preference for a particular city or academic center; lack of career counseling was also thought to be detrimental to obtaining employment following graduation (only 37% received counseling in 2011 and 47% in 2012).

Summary profile of under-unemployed population: Majority of impacted specialists is from procedural disciplines. 66 new graduates reported in 2011 not being able to find employment, up to 97 in 2012. Survey shows 39 new specialists (12.3%) in 2011 and 64 in 2012 (17.8%) were continuing training because they did not have a position. Of those continuing training in 2012 (subspecialty/fellowship), 60% stated they believe additional training will make them more employable. Among graduates at the endpoint of training in 2012 asked why they believe they do not have a job placement, 19 (40%) indicated they felt they did not have a job because they wished/needed to stay near family, 10 (21%) stated spousal employment and 14 (29%) indicated not liking living in rural/remote settings.

Ongoing research is needed to examine specialty and jurisdiction-specific trends in more detail to avoid, among others, over-correction in enrollment quotas.