



Opportunities in the specialty of family medicine

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Over the past few weeks all family doctors and our peer health and medical organizations across the country should have received correspondence from our College President, Dr Ruth Wilson, informing them that family medicine has recently been acknowledged as a specialty in Canada. After many years of deliberation, this decision finally aligns Canadian family medicine with the other medical specialties in Canada and with family medicine as a specialty in many sister nations around the world.

This decision also responds to a recommendation repeated over the past few years by many of our members, other health professionals, governments, media, the public, and medical students who are considering their future career choices. All have wanted to know why family medicine in Canada was not recognized as a specialty in the same way the other main disciplines of our medical schools and of our practice communities are.

The physicians populating the specialty of family medicine will be those currently holding valid Certification in Family Medicine from the College of Family Physicians of Canada (CCFP). Family doctors who do not currently hold a valid CCFP will be given the opportunity to acquire or re-acquire Certification should they wish to do so.

Former Certificants

Former Certificants—ie, those who held a CCFP designation in the past but did not maintain it—will be eligible to have their Certification reinstated and resume use of the CCFP designation. In order to do so, they must ensure that their College membership is in good standing, submit a prescribed number of continuing medical education and continuing professional development credits, and recommit to the College's Maintenance of Certification program.

FPs who have never held a CCFP

Those who were licensed to practice in Canada on or before January 1, 1994,* and who currently hold a licence in good standing to carry out independent family or general practice in a province or territory of Canada, will be eligible to obtain Certification through either the College's traditional practice-eligible pathway, including the

*The date after which licensing bodies required 2 years of postgraduate training and achievement of a CCFP designation in order to be granted a fully portable licence in Canada.

Certification Examination, or a time-limited Alternative Route to Certification. This will not include the traditional examination but will require participation in a peer-facilitated program. The program would involve development of a personal learning profile based on practice experiences, completion of a series of practice audits, and a patient-physician communication activity.

Applications are now being accepted for the Alternative Route to Certification program, which will begin in April 2008 and will continue until December 2012. While there will be a limit to the number of candidates that can be accepted at the same time, all interested physicians will be accommodated before the program ends. Candidates will be able to complete this program while carrying on with their practices. It will likely take about 6 months for each physician to complete all the elements.

Those who entered family or general practice after January 1, 1994, and who are also currently family physicians with licences in good standing, can participate in the College's traditional practice-eligible route to Certification.

Further information about each of the above opportunities is available on our website (www.cfpc.ca) or by contacting our Program Coordinator, Judith Gasnier, by e-mail at jg@cfpc.ca or by telephone at 905 629-0900, extension 409.

Taking the next step

Family medicine in Canada has long met the criteria required of a medical specialty: possessing a defined body of knowledge, skills, and attitudes; offering accredited postgraduate training programs in all Canadian university medical schools; conducting national certification examinations and a maintenance of certification program; developing a growing research base; and having a large established cadre of physicians committed to delivery of care, teaching, and research.

Canada's family physicians who are dedicated to the values and principles of our discipline and who have demonstrated competency in managing undifferentiated medical challenges and in providing patient-centred, comprehensive, continuing care have long met the criteria to be recognized as part of our specialty. Acknowledging family medicine as a specialty is an important step toward enhancing the value of family physicians and the essential role they play, as expert generalists, in caring for the whole patient.

We invite all family physicians across the country to consider the opportunity to take this step with us. 