

## Cardiology fellowship subspecialty training opportunities in Canada

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**Overseas experience broadens horizons, provides a different perspective on medicine and enhances a doctor's professional credibility. This article covers cardiology subspecialty training opportunities in Canada and offers advice on finding a job, the application process and acclimatization into Canadian life.**

Many doctors pursue advanced training in another country, perhaps to gain further experience in a subspecialty or in research, before returning home to a consultant post. With its common language, well funded health-care system and historical ties to Britain, Canada is a popular destination. British expatriates number nearly 800 000 and Canada is in many respects more similar to the UK than the USA is (Lechmere and Catto, 1995).

Individuals contemplating a permanent move may apply as family class immigrants if a close relative is a Canadian citizen, or as independents, where assessment is performed according to a point system (Lechmere and Catto, 1995).

Cardiology fellowships may be taken up as a specialist registrar or after obtaining the certificate of completion of specialist training. They are 1–2-year appointments and usually begin on 1 July. Clinical training posts are normally

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funded by the host institution whereas research positions generally require support from a national grant-giving body such as the British Heart Foundation or Wellcome Trust in Britain (Wellcome Trust, 1997; Uren and Chronos, 1997). This article offers advice on finding a job, the application process and acclimatization into Canadian life.

### FINDING A JOB

At the outset the approval of the postgraduate dean and local specialty training committee should be sought to ensure that this experience is recognized (Hall et al, 1995). Fellowship posts are available in electrophysiology, interventional cardiology, echocardiography and adult congenital heart disease as well as paediatric cardiology and cardiac surgery.

It is wise to begin searching at least 12 months before the anticipated starting date. As there is no single source listing the directors of individual programmes, contacting someone who has done a fellowship in your field is a useful first step. Ontario and British Columbia are the most frequent destinations.

Occasionally, vacancies are advertised in the *British Medical Journal*, and the job section of the *Canadian*

*Medical Association Journal* is worth a look. The website of the Canadian Association of Interventional Cardiology at [www.caic.com](http://www.caic.com) provides a helpful catalogue of cardiology centres and interventionalists in Canada.

Electrophysiology fellowships are listed in the Spring issue of the North American Society of Pacing and Electrophysiology Newsletter (NASPE, 1998). American College of Cardiology or American Heart Association meetings provide a venue to meet potential employers and can yield useful background information. Many centres insist on a personal interview, which will usually have to be funded by the applicant.

### EXAMINATION REQUIREMENTS

As a rule, individuals who seek an educational licence for clinical training need to take the Medical Council of Canada Evaluating Examination (MCCEE) if they do not have specialty certification from the UK or if the intended stay is longer than 2 years. It is a general assessment of medical knowledge and a pass is valid for 5 years (Table 1).

For specialist registrars, a letter confirming specialty training from the postgraduate dean has been known to allow exemption from the MCCEE.

**TABLE 1.**  
**Details of the Medical Council of Canada Evaluating Examination (MCCEE) and Qualifying Examination (MCCQE)**

Exam	Format	Pass rate*	Dates	Venue	Fee (Canadian \$)
MCCEE	Two 3.5-hour multiple choice question (MCQ) papers held on 1 day	55–60%	Twice a year in March and September	London UK	\$1000 (~£400)
MCCQE Part 1	Four written papers (3 MCQ, 1 short answer) held over 2 days	95–96%	Once a year in May	Canada only	\$650 (~£260)
MCCQE Part 2	A 2.5-hour objective-structured clinical examination held on 1 day	95–97%	Twice a year in May and October	Canada only	\$1000 (~£400)

\* Figures for the MCCQE apply to first time Canadian examinees. MCCQE pass rates for overseas graduates tend to be lower and more variable.

Doctors planning to practice medicine in Canada permanently need to obtain the Licentiate of the Medical Council of Canada which involves also passing the two-step Qualifying Examination (MCCQE) and completing 1 year of postgraduate medical training.

### OBTAINING A VISA AND EDUCATIONAL LICENCE

Having secured a job, this protracted process takes about 6 months and involves submitting three separate tiers of documentation. The first tier concerns acceptance onto the graduate training programme of the host institution and involves the verification of credentials and qualifications (*Table 2*).

For medical degrees not written in English or French, a translation may be required. The applicant's medical

school needs to provide evidence that the language of instruction and communication with patients was English or French. A detailed vaccination history, especially against hepatitis B, is commonly requested by the institution's occupational health department.

An application is then submitted to the provincial College of Physicians and Surgeons to obtain a certificate of registration for postgraduate education (also known as a postgraduate education certificate or educational licence). This is only issued after personally presenting your original medical degree and passport in Canada and is granted for a maximum of 2 years. Ontario now requires that all overseas applicants for clinical fellowships complete a Fellowship Entry Assessment Program before issuing an educational licence.

Immigration Canada undertake further security and medical checks, including a medical examination performed by a designated general practitioner in the UK. This process is initiated once the host institution informs Immigration Canada of the overseas appointment.

All being well, a letter arrives from the Canadian High Commission in London approving the application and indicating that the applicant may travel to Canada. After presenting the letter to a Canadian customs officer at the port of entry, a work visa (Employment Authorization) is issued. Fees are paid at various points, making the whole process expensive as well as frustrating, but it is ultimately well worthwhile.

### ACCLIMATIZATION IN CANADA

#### Accommodation

For university-affiliated appointments, registering as a postgraduate student can have advantages, including access to library facilities, cheaper flights and housing advice at the student's union. Local newspapers may be available on the Internet, permitting a preliminary search for accommodation before leaving Britain. Also, contacting the previous incumbent or a local property agent can provide useful information. Most available accommodation is unfurnished and rental conditions are heavily regulated, tending to favour the tenant.

#### Banking and communication

Funds can be transferred by taking an international draft in Canadian currency drawn on a bank in Britain or arranging for an electronic transfer after opening an account in Canada. The latter takes about 4 days to process. Telephone banking is increasingly used and is very convenient for paying bills. Mains electricity in Canada is 110V and it may be unsafe to use a transformer with British appliances. The best option is probably to use the hospital's computer facilities and purchase other equipment out there.

#### Driving

International driving licences are valid for up to 12 months in Canada. However, for those intending to buy a car, it is necessary to take a vision, written and road test at a Driver Examination Centre. All newly purchased vehicles must be registered with the Ministry of Transport. The largest assistance service is the Canadian Automobile Association (CAA) and car insurance costs about \$1 600 (~£650) per annum. Many insurance providers will not insure without full UK documentation and a Canadian driving licence.

#### Medical defence

The main provider is the Canadian Medical Protective Association and applications should be submitted several months before going to Canada. However, full membership is only granted following arrival once an educational licence number has been assigned by the provincial College of Physicians and Surgeons.

Annual subscription fees are currently \$1 044 (~£420) for clinical fellows and may be reimbursed by the host institution. Waived membership is available from British defence organizations for members taking up residence in Canada. No subscriptions are payable while abroad.

#### Health insurance

Health care is the responsibility of the Ministry of Health in each province. They provide a free health insurance plan but this only takes effect

**TABLE 2.**  
Documentation required by the host institution or needed to obtain an educational licence and employment authorization

Curriculum vitae
Application forms, with photograph, and seal of notary public or commissioner for oaths
Birth certificate
Confirmation of medical school graduation
Medical school transcript
Language requirement: medical school report or a pass in the TOEFL
GMC annual registration certificate
Certificate of good standing obtainable from the GMC
Form for Board Action Search by the Federation of State Medical Boards*
Photocopies of all degrees and qualifications: MB, MRCP, MD
Evidence of specialty certification (CCST), if applicable
Medical examination, including a chest X-ray
Immunization record
A pass in the Medical Council of Canada Evaluating Examination
Letter of appointment from the host institution
Passport

\* needed if the applicant has previously worked in the USA. CCST= Certificate of completion of specialist training; GMC = General Medical Council; TOEFL= Test of English as a foreign language

3 months after registering. Therefore, university health insurance coverage for this period should be obtained following arrival from the postgraduate medical education office of the host institution. As neither plan covers dental treatment, which can be expensive, any important work should be done before leaving Britain. One's spouse and children are not covered by the Ministry of Health plan, so university health insurance is needed for them for the entire period.

### Social insurance and taxation

A social insurance number can be obtained from the nearest Canada Employment Centre and is necessary for taxation purposes. Britain and Canada have a reciprocal agreement whereby an individual cannot be taxed in both countries simultaneously. Tax may be deducted from the monthly salary by one's employer or paid by submitting a return to Revenue Canada for each calendar year. A financial advisor can provide helpful advice.

### THE FELLOWSHIP

The Division of Cardiology at The Toronto Hospital was well staffed and equipped to accommodate the needs of the trainee. The interventional cardiology fellowship provided a period of intensive experience facilitating rapid familiarity with equipment and different types of case.

The programme included funding to attend one course and one international meeting during the year. In 1996, interventional activity rates were 360/million in the UK and 847/million in Canada (Dr M Norell, personal communication, 1998). Thus there are many high-volume centres in Canada and posts generally provide additional training in diagnostic studies as well.

A log book of procedures should be kept and may be useful for future subspecialty accreditation in Britain. Experience can be gained in newer techniques such as intracoronary ultrasound, rotablation or the radial approach. Posts vary in the degree of autonomy permitted and many also have a research dimension that relies heavily on personal initiative. A com-

prehensive computer database of cases, if available, can be an excellent starting point. The salary for a clinical fellow averages \$50 000 (~£20 000) per year.

### CONCLUSIONS

Canadians enjoy a comparatively high standard of living and the country has a low crime rate and relatively informal social structure, free of Britain's class consciousness. Money is a more overt driver of society. Negative points include high taxes, bureaucracy and cold winters in most parts of the country.

A more demanding public has brought about a better funded health-care system, allowing greater scope for subspecialization. One sees a consultant-provided rather than a consultant-led service, with cardiologists tending to have a much narrower brief than in Britain.

Although some individuals choose to stay on for good, most will need to

investigate the possibility of a permanent job on their return home. Overseas experience broadens horizons, provides a different perspective on medicine and enhances a doctor's professional credibility (Adams, 1989). Cardiology training in Britain should be flexible enough to accommodate these appointments which may fill in gaps in experience obtained in the UK. **HM**

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- Hall RJC, Boyle RM, Webb-Peploe M, Chamberlain D, Parker DJ (1995) Guidelines for specialist training in cardiology. *Br Heart J* **73**(suppl 1): 1-24
- Lechmere A, Cattoo S (1995) *Live & Work in the USA and Canada*. Vacation Work, Oxford
- North American Society of Pacing and Electrophysiology (1998) List of training and fellowship programs available: 1999-2000. *NASPE News* **19**: Issue 2
- Uren NG, Chronos NAF (1997) Working as a cardiologist in the USA. *Heart* **77**: 194-7
- Wellcome Trust (1997) *Grants and Support for Biomedical Research*. Wellcome Trust, London

### Useful addresses

The Canadian Medical Association  
1867 Alta Vista Drive  
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, K1G 3Y6  
Tel: + 1 (613) 731 9331  
Website: [www.cma.ca/](http://www.cma.ca/)  
Email: [cmamsc@cma.ca](mailto:cmamsc@cma.ca)

The Medical Council of Canada  
PO Box /CP 8234, Station 'T'  
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, K1G 3H7  
Tel: + 1 (613) 521 6012  
Website: [www.mcc.ca](http://www.mcc.ca)

Canadian High Commission  
Immigration Section, Macdonald House  
38 Grosvenor Street  
London W1X 0AA  
Fax: (0171) 258 6506  
Website: [www.canada.org.uk/visa-info/](http://www.canada.org.uk/visa-info/)

Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada  
774 Promenade Echo Drive  
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, K1S 5N8  
Tel: + 1 (613) 730 8177  
Website: [rcpsc.medical.org](http://rcpsc.medical.org)  
Email: [info@rcpsc.edu](mailto:info@rcpsc.edu)

The Canadian Cardiovascular Society  
222 Queen Street, Suite 1403  
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, K1P 5V9  
Tel: + 1 (613) 569 3407  
Website: [www.ccs.ca](http://www.ccs.ca)  
Email: [ccsinfo@ccs.ca](mailto:ccsinfo@ccs.ca)

Canadian Medical Protective Association  
PO Box 8225, Station 'T'  
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, K1G 3H7  
Tel: + 1 (613) 725 2000  
Fax: + 1 (613) 725 2336

### KEY POINTS

- Begin searching for a post at least 12 months before the anticipated starting date.
- Obtaining a visa and an educational licence takes about 6 months and involves providing documentation to the host institution, the provincial College of Physicians and Surgeons, and Immigration Canada.
- Sort out issues such as medical defence and health insurance as early as possible.
- Keep a log book of all procedures undertaken and experience obtained.
- Fellowship appointments may be very useful for filling in gaps in experience obtained in the UK.