

Alberta International Medical Graduates Association

# Observership Program



Let's work together.



Support for Today  
Change for a Healthy Tomorrow

## ABOUT AIMGA

### Our Mission

AIMGA is committed to the responsible, informed, and equitable integration of international graduate physicians into the Canadian Healthcare System. The Association aims for the recognition of skills and experience gained outside Canada, without compromising current Canadian medical ideals or standards.

### Our Vision

Our vision is to integrate IMGs into the Alberta Health Care System, thus working towards the benefit of the growing population of Alberta.

### We believe

- International Medical Graduates represent a skilled and professional workforce that should be utilized to support and improve Alberta's health care system.
- There should be fair and equitable access for all Alberta's international medical graduates to the medical licensing and training programs according to the Canadian standards.
- All Albertans should have the best health care in the world.
- There is a physician shortage in the province and that this shortage is affecting the quality of health care received by Albertans.
- As Alberta's immigrant population is rapidly increasing, there is a need for IMG's who can understand and respect the needs of Alberta's culturally diverse population.
- Dialogue and cooperation with decision makers at all governmental levels will promote the smooth integration of Alberta's international medical graduates into the Canadian health care system.

## Let's work together

The Government of Alberta reports that **Alberta is currently short 1,100 physicians**, and this shortage is expected to increase to 1,800 by the year 2016.

The number of retiring health professionals is increasing, and the demand for health services is growing due to an increasing and aging population.

At AIMGA, we have over 600 members who are International Medical Graduates (IMGs) at various stages of the licensure process including many who have completed their licensure requirements and are awaiting acceptance into Residency Training Programs.

**But without clinical experience, these IMGs continue to wait.** And the physician shortage continues to grow.

**Together, we can help.**

## AIMGA'S OBSERVERSHIP PROGRAM

AIMGA's Observership Program will provide IMGs with the opportunity to observe licensed Albertan physicians in their Canadian medical settings.

This program will run from the fall of 2009 and continue throughout the winter of 2010. It is a three month program in which each selected IMG will observe three different physicians in their private clinics.

AIMGA will:

- Screen and select qualified IMGs to participate in the Observership Program
- Identify physicians interested in providing observership opportunities
- Host a workshop for the physicians and the selected IMGs after matching to introduce them to each other and give a brief description about the program expectations and requirements
- Assist physicians and the IMGs to develop their own mutually defined objectives
- Provide each program participant with an observership guide book, evaluation forms, contact information and other relevant materials
- Place and monitor each IMG candidate with the selected physicians
- Receive and review monthly IMG evaluation reports from the physicians

## What is an Observership?

An 'Observership', also commonly called a 'Mentorship', provides an opportunity for the IMG to interact with real patients to help them integrate and transfer knowledge and experience previously acquired in their international education to the Canadian context.

A Mentor (or may also be called a 'Preceptor') is a practicing physician licensed in Alberta who gives personal instruction, training and supervision to a medical student or young physician.

Practicing physicians who are licensed in Alberta will act as mentors for the IMGs selected for AIMGA's Observership Program.

## PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

Through our Observership Program, we hope to achieve the following results for the IMGs who are selected to take part in the program:

- Observership opportunities will enable IMGs to make meaningful relationships with future colleagues in their profession, to reinforce the formalized course-based learning and to provide direct experience of real patients in a professionally monitored setting.
- Observerships will introduce IMGs to the discipline of family medicine in Canada, and the problems commonly encountered in a family practice setting.
- IMGs will be introduced to the patient-centred clinical approach to maintain and promote the health of patients.
- Observerships will facilitate the acculturation of IMGs to the Canadian medical environment.
- IMGs will have direct experience in the areas of relationship-building, focused interviewing, shared decision-making, medical problem solving, and culturally appropriate norms of communication with patients and other health care professionals.
- IMGs will become familiar with the routine clinical procedures – interviewing, history taking, physical examination, writing consultation reports and use of laboratory tests required for the competency in family practice.
- IMGs will have the opportunity to obtain Canadian letters of reference

## Observerships in Family Medicine

Family medicine represents an approach to patients, which is open-ended and not delimited by discipline: the commitment is to the patient, not to a body of knowledge. Anything the patient wants to talk about is relevant. Caring and compassion are essential elements of the method.

*(Stewart et al, 2003; McWhinney, 1997; Cassell, 1997)*

### **The four Principles of Family Medicine reflecting the patient-centred clinical approach are:**

- The family physician is a skilled clinician
- Family medicine is community-based
- The family physician is a resource to a defined practice population
- The doctor-patient relationship is central to the role of the family physician

### **An Observership in family medicine offers a perspective and a setting that can enhance the experience of IMGs seeking licensure in Alberta:**

- Patients seen in a family practice closely represent the demography of illness in the community;
- Patients seen in the earliest stages of their illnesses are appropriate for learning clinical reasoning;
- Patients in a family practice setting are well suited for learning clinical judgment and finding common ground;
- Personal, family and other contextual factors are more apparent thus demonstrating the importance of addressing all of the determinants of illness.

## PROGRAM SUPPORT

Over the course of the Observership Program term, AIMGA will provide the following support:

- AIMGA will provide an observership guide book
- AIMGA will screen and identify qualified IMGs to participate in the program
- AIMGA will create a pool of interested physicians to serve as Mentors
- AIMGA will develop an online application form
- AIMGA will coordinate a workshop for the physicians and the selected IMGs
- AIMGA will provide a standardised evaluation report through which all the selected IMGs will be evaluated
- AIMGA will provide ongoing coordination help and resources through regular phone calls, emails, sharing materials of common interest and recognizing the uniqueness and contribution of each individual as opportunities prevail.

## Program Evaluation

As this is the first opportunity for the organization to undertake such a program, effective data collection and evaluation procedures are critical. Important lessons learned will be well-documented for future undertakings.

A formal evaluation tool will be used by the Mentors to assess the competences in knowledge, skills and behaviours of IMGs. AIMGA will develop a database to capture:

- records of attendance
- withdrawal or expulsion
- progress and assessment records
- records regarding further training completed
- success rate and progress achieved by each learner after completion of program.

The data collected will also be used to:

- Assess the effectiveness of programs for which AIMGA receives funding
- Create a profile of those IMGs who chose to participate in the program
- Identify knowledge, skills or behaviours gaps
- Facilitate the design of remedial training programs for specific knowledge, skills or behaviour gaps

**IMGs will also have the opportunity to provide AIMGA with a formal evaluation of the program and their experiences.**

## IMG SELECTION PROCESS

AIMGA has developed a formal process for selecting IMGs who are interested in taking part in the Observership Program.

AIMGA will manage and facilitate this process through the following activities:

- AIMGA will post the Observership Program description on the AIMGA website to enable all IMGs to access full information about the program.
- AIMGA will notify all members about the program and how to apply.
- AIMGA will create an online application system for IMGs to apply to the Observership Program.
- AIMGA will select the most suitable IMGs who meet the Observership Program's eligibility criteria.
- Successful applicants who are admitted to the Observership Program and will be matched with appropriate Mentors.

Please note that, based on the number of Mentors available, there will be a limited number of eligible IMGs admitted to the Observership Program. Every effort will be taken to recruit Mentors in order to accommodate as many eligible IMGs as possible. AIMGA reserves the right to select the most suitable participants from all qualified IMG applicants to the Observership Program.

## Eligibility Criteria

IMGs who apply to the Observership Program must meet the following **minimum** eligibility criteria:

- Must be a permanent resident or a refugee in Canada, as defined under the Immigrant and Adaptation Program (ISAP) definitions for the Medical Council of Canada Evaluating Exam (MCCEE)
- Must prove demonstrated English proficiency (TOEFL, IELTS, CLBA)
- Must have passed the Medical Council of Canada Evaluating Exams (MCCEE)
- Must be an active member of AIMGA

## **ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES: Physicians (or 'Mentors')**

Practicing physicians who are licensed in Alberta will be asked to volunteer to act as mentors for the IMGs selected for AIMGA's Observership Program.

As Mentors, the physicians will need to:

- Allow an IMG to carry out the Observership according to the terms of the agreement, and as allowed by the medical practice observership/experience CPSA guideline.
- Become familiar with the expectations of this Observership Program.
- Develop a learning contract with the IMG
- Complete the evaluation form at the end of the Observership period and return one copy to AIMGA
- Provide IMGs with at least one reference letter needed to apply for a residency program (ie. AIMG Program or CaRMS)

## **Physician Recruitment**

Many physicians have already shown interest in acting as Mentors. AIMGA will work to recruit more physicians to create an adequate pool of Mentors.

AIMGA is planning to achieve this goal as follows:

- The Observership Program Coordinator will identify interested Alberta licensed physicians in the Edmonton and Calgary areas who are willing to provide observership opportunities
- The Observership Program Coordinator will contact physicians by email, mail, phone and in-person to explain the goals and the process of the program, and to invite them to participate.

**For more information about becoming a Mentor**, please contact AIMGA at [aimga.obs@shaw.ca](mailto:aimga.obs@shaw.ca) or by calling toll-free 1-887-520-7730.

## **ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES: IMGs (or 'Program Participants')**

Those IMGs who are successfully selected to take part in the Observership Program will be required to meet the following responsibilities over the course of the Observership term:

- Negotiate with his or her Mentor about his or her schedule
- Develop a contract for the Observership goals and learning experience
- Sign a memorandum of agreement committing to do the Observership for an agreed upon duration.
- Request references letters from your Mentor as appropriate
- Be professional
- Be punctual
- Dress professionally:
  - No jeans or sneakers
  - Wear a white clinical jacket, if appropriate
  - No perfumes / aftershave as patients may have allergies
- Respect patient rights:
  - Non-judgemental attitude toward patients
  - Maintain confidentiality
  - Extend appropriate sympathy to patients

### **Patients expect more than technical expertise.**

They want physicians who will connect with them at a human level, listen intently to their concerns and involve them in decisions about their care. Patients seen in a clinical setting are able to have a greater say in the management of their illnesses than are seriously ill patients in the hospital.

Consequently, finding common ground with patients can best be learned in the clinical setting.

## SUGGESTED OBSERVERSHIP GUIDELINES

Supervised patient care contact will be the basis of the IMG's experience. Initially, the Mentor will assess the IMG's understanding of medical history taking, examination differential diagnosis, appropriate investigations, treatment, counselling, and follow-up. Once the Mentor has an appreciation of the IMG's level of functioning, he or she can decide how the remaining period of the observership will be supervised.

We suggest that the IMG assume the Mentor's schedule wherever possible unless there are extenuating circumstances, and then these should be discussed with the Mentor. In order to fulfill the legal requirements and be within the legal boundaries of practicing medicine in Canada, note that this program is for observership only. (Please see the CPSA guidelines on medical practice observation/experience.)

### **Suggestions for initial orientation:**

- Review learning contract with the IMG
- Discuss expectations regarding patient contact
- Orient the IMG to the practice in the community
- Introduce IMG to staff
- Review office lab and in-office procedures
- In case of a computerized office, provide a brief introduction to the program
- Introduction to the various lab work forms, WCB, referral forms, etc. used in family practice
- Introduce CPS and other reference material available in the office should the need arise

### **Suggestions for on-going learning:**

- Patients should be introduced to the IMG by the Mentor or reception staff, and appropriate safeguards made to ensure that the patient is willing and not coerced into seeing the IMG. The Mentor or IMG should introduce themselves making it very clear what their expectations are.
- Whenever possible, the IMG should observe and learn procedural skills.
- The IMG needs to be aware of available community resources, e.g., anticoagulation clinic, AADAC, etc. (IMGs please make an attempt to find out about various agencies in Alberta.)
- The IMG should attempt to learn how referral letters are written. If possible, review referral letters to see how the consultation contributed to better patient care.
- The IMG should review the lab results and follow up diagnosis with the Mentor whenever possible.
- At the Mentor's discretion, allow IMGs to interact with medical representatives, attend seminars and conferences, etc.

## PHYSICIAN FEEDBACK

Mentors are expected to provide the IMG with constructive feedback – the essential ingredient for learning. IMGs need to be told specifically what aspects of patient approach/care need improvement.

Mentors should make appropriate comment on the IMG's:

- Cognitive skills and knowledge
- Problem solving and patient management
- Behaviour and attitudinal skills
- Communication skills and working relationships
- Ability to work in a team
- Motivation and punctuality
- Sense of responsibility
- Procedural skills specific to the discipline to which the application is being made.

The Mentor will be required to complete a formal assessment of the IMG's clinical performance. This is important as it will be stored on file and used whenever the IMG needs a reference letter.

## Contact AIMGA

For more information about our Observership Program, please contact us at:

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