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Letter to the Editor

International Medical Graduates and the Physician Shortage

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The recent Federal election once again raised the issue of the physician shortage to the Canadian public. It is now widely noted that 5 million Canadians do not have access to a family physician.¹ The solutions should include increased enrolment in current medical schools, new medical schools, and increased residency positions with further acceptance of all qualified applicants. This year 100 additional residency positions were made available.²

The results of this year's match indicated that 97.3% of Canadian medical school graduates and only 19.8% of international medical graduates were able to obtain a residency with 1,622 un-matched individuals.³ Thus, the focus on the physician supply should concentrate on the shortage of residency positions which is preventing access to healthcare for Canadians.

There is a growing trend of Canadians like myself who are graduates of "Offshore Medical Schools" and a report by The Canadian Resident Matching Service indicates that nearly 3,500 Canadians are studying in these schools. There are several difficulties that individuals perceive coming back to Canada for graduate training from a lack of clinical clerkships in Canada to limited training positions for international medical graduates.⁴

In my personal experience as a Canadian citizen who completed my undergraduate training at the University of Toronto then attended a medical school in the Caribbean. I feel that the medical education and training system is not utilizing the individuals of this nation as effectively as possible. The Canadian Caribbean medical school graduates who are unable to obtain a residency in Canada or are disheartened by the process will complete residency training in the United States and these individuals may remain there after training.

The Canadian medical education system can accommodate increased enrolment through aggressively adopting information technology into their curriculum. For example, internet based medical education has been shown to be effective if it engages the user and offers a value-added experience.⁵ Embracing both information technology and international medical graduates along with increased residency positions will be key to maintain this nation's healthcare system.

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