

Council of Ontario Faculties of Medicine (COFM) Policy Document

Essential Skills and Abilities Required for the Study of Medicine

The Ontario Faculties of Medicine are responsible to society to provide a program of study so that graduates have the knowledge, skills, professional behaviours and attitudes necessary to enter the supervised practice of medicine in Canada. Graduates must be able to diagnose and manage health problems and provide comprehensive, compassionate care to their patients. For this reason, students in the MD program must possess the cognitive, communication, sensory, motor, and social skills necessary to interview, examine, and counsel patients, and competently complete certain technical procedures in a reasonable time while ensuring patient safety.

In addition to obtaining an MD degree, and completing an accredited residency training program, an individual must pass the licensure examinations of the Medical Council of Canada (MCC) in order to practice medicine. Prospective candidates should be aware that, cognitive, physical examination, management skills, communication skills, and professional behaviours are all evaluated in timed simulations of patient encounters.

All students must have the required skills and abilities described in the Section on Technical Standards. All individuals are expected to review this document to assess their ability to meet these standards. This policy does not preclude individuals with disabilities. Students who anticipate requiring disability-related accommodation are responsible for notifying the medical school.

Because of the comprehensive, additive and integrative nature of the curriculum, students are expected to complete the MD degree within three or four years. Students with a disability may be granted an extension of time within which to complete the MD program. These requests are considered on a case-by-case basis. All other requests for a leave of absence are discussed in a separate policy.

Technical Standards for Students in the MD Program

A candidate for the MD degree must demonstrate the following abilities:

Observation

A student must be able to participate in learning situations that require skills in observation. In particular, a student must be able to accurately observe a patient and acquire visual, auditory and tactile information.

Communication

A student must be able to speak, to hear and to observe patients in order to effectively and efficiently elicit information, describe mood, activity and posture and perceive non-verbal communication. A student must be able to communicate effectively and sensitively with patients, families and any member of the health care team. A student must also be able to summarize coherently a patient's condition and management plan verbally and in writing.

Motor

A student must demonstrate sufficient motor function to safely perform a physical examination on a patient, including palpation, auscultation and percussion. The examination must be done independently and in a timely fashion. A student must be able to use common diagnostic aids or instruments either directly or in an adaptive form (e.g. sphygmomanometer, stethoscope, otoscope and ophthalmoscope). A student must be able to execute motor movements reasonably required to provide general and emergency medical care to patients

Intellectual-Conceptual, Integrative and Quantitative Abilities

A student must demonstrate the cognitive skills and memory necessary to measure, calculate, and reason in order to analyze, integrate and synthesize information. In addition, the student must be able to comprehend dimensional and spatial relationships. All of these problem-solving activities must be done in a timely fashion.

Behavioural and Social Attributes

A student must consistently demonstrate the emotional health required for full utilization of her/his intellectual abilities. The application of good judgment, and the prompt completion of all responsibilities attendant to the diagnosis and care of patients is necessary. The development of mature, sensitive and effective relationships with patients, families and other members of the health care team are also required. The student must be able to tolerate the physical, emotional, and mental demands of the program and function effectively under stress. Adaptability to changing environments and the ability to function in the face of uncertainties that are inherent in the care of patients are both necessary.

Compassion, integrity, concern for others, interpersonal skills, interest and motivation are all personal qualities that physicians must demonstrate and are expected qualities of students.

Students with Disabilities

Disability is defined by Section 10 (1) of the Ontario Human Rights Code.

The Ontario Faculties of Medicine (COFM) are committed to facilitating the integration of students with disabilities into the University community. Each student with a disability is entitled to reasonable accommodation that will assist her/him to meet the standards. Reasonable accommodation will be made to facilitate student's progress. However, such accommodation cannot compromise patient safety and well-being. Reasonable accommodation may require members of the University community to exercise creativity and flexibility in responding to the needs of students with disabilities while maintaining the academic and technical standards. The student with a disability must be able to demonstrate the knowledge and perform the necessary skills independently. There are a few circumstances in which an intermediary may be appropriate. However, no disability can be accommodated if the intermediary has to provide cognitive support, substitute for cognitive skills, perform a physical examination and/or in any way supplement clinical judgment. The appropriateness of an intermediary will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

This policy acknowledges that central to the success of a student with a disability in completing the MD program is her/his responsibility to demonstrate self-reliance and to identify needs requiring accommodation in a timely fashion.