

The Medicine Garden

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Horticulture is to medical school as a flower is to a medical professional. Take note, this is no average garden! Medical schools and training programs meticulously control the growing conditions—watering schedule (teaching), soil (curriculum), and sunlight (positive and negative experiences)—to ensure that each seed (medical student) is planted in the most optimal environment. The ultimate goal is for trainees to blossom into beautiful, symmetrical, six-petaled flowers that flourish in residency and bloom until retirement. Have you guessed what this horticulture technique is yet? More widely known by its formal name, the CanMEDS framework is a set of competency standards outlining the seven roles of a well-integrated physician in modern society.¹ However, one might argue that the expectation of a trainee to become a medical expert, a communicator, a collaborator, a leader, a health advocate, a scholar, and a professional is unrealistic.² More alarmingly, others have posed that the demand for physicians to hold too many roles contributes to physician burnout.³ After all, there are no perfect horticulturists, no perfect seeds, and no perfect method. This process is dynamic, as producing medical professionals who can face the contemporary challenges of the healthcare system requires constant refinement.

The CanMEDS framework was established in the 1990s by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada and more recently updated in 2015 to incorporate milestones for Canadian residency programs.⁴ Each role in the CanMEDS framework lays out a fundamental building block of the modern Canadian physician as informed by broad stakeholder consultation. Similarly, the CanMEDS–Family Medicine 2017 framework by the College of Family Physicians of Canada uses seven leaves on a tree to paint the overall roles and responsibilities of a well-rounded Canadian family physician.⁵ Trickle downstream of the Colleges, a similar evolution of newer teaching methods and curriculum renewal has occurred at Canadian medical schools to nurture the various CanMEDS roles.¹ Active learning has replaced much of the eight-hour lecture day in medical school, with students taking part in case-based or problem-based learning, small group activities, interprofessional seminars, and community-oriented experiences. The trainee therefore takes on multiple roles throughout the day while learning in the classroom, conducting research, or taking on a leadership role by facilitating his or her small group activity. These activities mimic the expectations and routines of a competent physician in the workplace. Learning objectives in and out of the classroom also nourish the skills and attitudes necessary to face the challenges of contemporary medicine. For example, students may be in a small group focused seminar discussing the basics of genetic testing or learning how to have a dialogue regarding end-of-life care.

It is, without a doubt, not an easy task to ensure that all medical trainees achieve the competencies laid out by the seven pillars of CanMEDS. Simultaneously, one should appreciate the beauty of the

inevitable asymmetry in a flower's petals, regardless of how much watering and fertilizer it receives. This issue of the University of British Columbia (UBC) Medical Journal explores medical education throughout Canada, featuring pieces from renowned faculty members at UBC who take part in the effortful process of developing a modern medical school curriculum. Dr. Cheryl Holmes discusses the unofficial lessons from medical education in her piece “Addressing the Hidden Curriculum at UBC.” Dr. Clarissa Wallace shares her insights from educators and philosophers on the importance of learning by teaching, while Dr. Gurdeep Parhar explores how UBC is tackling the contemporary issue of training socially responsible physicians. Finally, Dr. Roger Wong examines how the emphasis of active learning has led to a refinement in assessment tools in medical education. It is our hope that these curated pieces, along with a record number of thought-provoking Commentaries, will help us objectively, critically, and courageously discuss these issues to move the field of medicine forward.

References

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