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PGME Fellowship Guidelines

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Overview

All trainees in postgraduate medical fellowships offered by the Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry (FoMD), at the University of Alberta (the University) are registered by the Postgraduate Medical Education Office (PGME).

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance on the governance of fellows and the fellowship programs within which they train. The goal is to ensure that fellows can access appropriate educational experiences in a positive learning environment where they are treated fairly and with respect.

These guidelines apply to the following categories of fellows as further described in Section 1 of these guidelines: Clinical Fellow, Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (RCPSC) Area of Focused Competence (AFC) Diploma Fellow, Clinical Research Fellow, and Research Fellow. These guidelines are not applicable to postgraduate training overseen by Dentistry departments.

Preference for fellowship start dates are July 1st. If starting at a different time of the year, they must start at the first of the month. Required documentation must be received by PGME a minimum three (3) months prior to the start of the fellowship for trainees with Canadian citizenship or permanent resident status. Documents must be received by PGME a minimum of six (6) months in advance for trainees who will require a work permit.

1. CATEGORIES OF FELLOWS

- a. Clinical Fellow
 - i. A trainee who has completed Canadian specialty training requirements and is pursuing clinical training within the specialty beyond the requirements for specialty or subspecialty certification, or
 - ii. A trainee who is registered for the purpose of obtaining specific experience in a specialty or subspecialty which is not currently accredited by the RCPSC, or
 - iii. A trainee with a PhD degree (applies to Department of Laboratory Medicine & Pathology only).
- b. Area of Focused Competence (AFC) Diploma Fellow
 - i. A trainee who is registered in a Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (RCPSC) accredited AFC Diploma program at the University of Alberta.
 - ii. All trainees must meet RCPSC eligibility requirements.
- c. Clinical Research Fellow
 - i. A trainee whose training primarily consists of clinical research involving interactions with patients.
 - ii. A trainee who has completed Canadian specialty training requirements and is pursuing clinical research training.
- d. Research Fellow
 - i. A trainee who is only doing research that does not involve patient contact or clinical involvement.

2. PROGRAM ORGANIZATION AND OVERSIGHT

- a. A fellowship program must be overseen by a Division or Department within the FoMD.
- b. There must be a fellowship director to oversee the organization, administration, operation and evaluation of the fellowship training.
 - i. The fellowship director must have an official affiliation with the University through their respective Department.
 - ii. The fellowship director may be the same person as the educational supervisor.
 - iii. An AFC program must have an AFC program director as well as the prescribed organization structure of committees as required by RCPSC AFC accreditation standards.

3. FELLOWSHIP FUNDING AND BENEFITS

- a. Fellowships without salary or funding are not permitted.
- b. The PGME Office does not provide salary, administrative or operational funding for fellowship programs.
- c. All fellowships must include a salary sufficient to cover the estimated basic cost of living in Edmonton, Alberta. Starting January 1, 2026, the minimum salary must be at least equivalent to that of the PARA guidelines for an R1 salary.
- d. Fellowships may be funded from a variety of sources including agencies and societies pertaining to the area of training.
- e. For fellowship programs that have a component of independent service billing for the purpose of generating fellowship salaries, programs will aim to have an independent billing services component of no more than 30% of the fellowship time to ensure appropriate education:service ratio.
- f. Fellows are not included in the collective agreement with the Professional Association of Resident Physicians of Alberta (PARA).

- i. Leaves for fellows are outlined in the “Fellowship Leaves Guidelines”.
- ii. Extensions are at the discretion of the Educational Supervisor and/or Fellowship Director and PGME Office.
- iii. Fellows are not entitled to personal days.
- iv. Fellowships should be aware of and aim to follow PARA call and post call guidelines. At the program and fellows’ discretion, the call and post call guidelines can be modified to ensure that specific learning experiences for which fellows are undergoing a fellowship can be attained. Programs and departments should be cognizant of patient safety and physician burnout during these times and ensure that these elements are safely addressed.

4. PROGRAM INFORMATION AND APPLICATION PROCESS

- a. The program must clearly outline requirements and deadlines for fellowship application on the program website linked to the PGME Website.
- b. For international applicants, the program must indicate that a work permit is required before the fellowship can begin, and provide the link to the Canada Immigration website.
- c. For Clinical, Clinical Research and AFC Diploma fellows (with the exception of Clinical Fellows with a PhD and not MD degree), the program must indicate that provincial licensure with the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta (CPSA) is required before fellowship can begin, and provide information on licensure requirement and the link to the CPSA.
- d. The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta (CPSA) requirement for English language proficiency must be clearly specified on the website, and provide the link to the relevant website.
- e. The program should have a formalized and structured application process.
 - i. All correspondence between the program and the applicant should be in writing.

5. FELLOW SELECTION

- a. The program should have a formalized, structured and transparent selection process.
- b. Detailed criteria for fellowship selection (file review, interview requirement and format) should be posted on the program website.

6. FELLOW OFFER PROCESS

- a. After the program has completed the selection process, a Letter of Offer can be sent by the Division/Department to the selected candidate.
 - i. The Letter of Offer is not an official contract or letter of employment, and is contingent upon review and approval of the Associate Dean, PGME.
 - ii. The Letter of Offer must be prepared on Division/Department letterhead, using the “Letter of Offer” template provided by the PGME Office, and must include:
 1. the category of fellowship being offered;
 2. the title of the specific Fellowship as well as the Division or Department responsible for the fellowship training;
 3. the name of the educational supervisor; and
 4. the description of training in CanMEDS format, which must:
 - a. aim to meet the educational needs of the fellow, and should define the competencies to be achieved, and
 - b. indicate the training experiences needed for the attainment of the stated competencies, the expectations regarding academic productivity, call duties and service requirements.

- iii. The Letter of Offer must indicate that the first three (3) months of training are on a probation basis, with a summative assessment at the end of the three (3) months.
- iv. The fellowship may be terminated by either party at any time until the end of the probation period in the event of unsatisfactory performance or if the fellow feels that the program is a poor fit for his/her/their learning needs.
- v. The PGME Office must be copied on the Letter of Offer.
- vi. For international fellows who have sponsorship agreements between the University of Alberta Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry and a government or ministry in their home country, the sponsor must be copied on the Letter of Offer.
- vii. The Letter of Offer must be signed by the fellowship director, the supervisor, the divisional director/department chair and the fellow.
- b. The proposed fellowship as set out in the Letter of Offer is subject to review and approval of the Associate Dean, PGME.
 - i. The signed (by fellowship director, supervisor, divisional director/department chair, and fellow) Letter of Offer must be sent to the PGME Office, along with the Application Registration Form for Fellows. These documents must be received by PGME a minimum of three (3) months prior to the start of the fellowship for trainees with Canadian citizenship or permanent resident status. Documents must be received by PGME a minimum of six (6) months in advance for trainees who will require a work permit.
 - ii. Fellowships that do not adhere to the timelines will result in a delayed fellowship start date.
- c. On receipt of the signed Letter of Offer by PGME, and approval by the Associate Dean, PGME, a Letter of Engagement and a PGME Registration Form will be sent to the selected candidate.
 - i. The Letter of Engagement from the PGME Office is the official contract.

7. FELLOW ORIENTATION

- a. The program must have an orientation process for fellows.
 - i. This should include components specific to the clinical and/or research training environment of the area of training.
 - ii. For international fellows, the orientation should include an introduction to the Canadian medical system.
 - iii. All fellows with clinical interaction as part of the training should be oriented to the local medical system (e.g. Medical charts, Medical Records, Electronic Medical Records systems, clinical training sites, etc.)
 - iv. Fellows should be provided information on, and how to access guidelines and policies applicable to them.

8. ASSESSMENT AND APPEALS

- a. The program must conduct regular in-training assessments (e.g. at the end of the three (3) month probationary period, every six (6) months, and at the completion of training).
 - i. Assessment of AFC Diploma fellows must adhere to the standards set out by the RCPSC.
- b. The program should establish and maintain a process to notify fellows of identified deficiencies in a timely fashion.
- c. The program must have a mechanism for appeal, and adhere to the PGME Academic Appeals Policy.
- d. The program must promptly inform the PGME Office in writing of any decision for remediation or termination of fellowship training.

9. HARASSMENT AND INTIMIDATION

- a. The program must foster a positive learning environment in which the fellows are treated fairly with respect, in accordance with the University's Discrimination, Harassment and Duty to Accommodate Policy.

10. CHANGE IN TRAINING CATEGORY

- a. In the event that the category of fellowship changes during the course of training, the PGME Office must be promptly notified in writing.

11. TRAINING EXTENSION

- a. Clinical fellowships are time-defined training programs with the usual length of time ranging from three (3) months to two (2) years.
- b. Extensions of training are only considered for completion of educational requirements or attainment of competencies where there is a reasonable likelihood that the requirements will be achieved by the extension. Extensions will not be considered in situations where funding will not be available for the extension. The total of all extensions can not exceed one (1) year.
- c. Requests for extension of training must be in writing, from the fellowship director in consultation with the supervisor, and sent to the PGME Office at least three (3) months prior to the proposed extension date.
 - i. Late requests may be denied.
- d. Written request for training extension must include the following:
 - i. A description of the specific competencies to be attained during the training extension and the duration of the proposed extension;
 - ii. The fellow's assessment to date to reflect their progress;
 - iii. The named supervisor for the extended period of training; and
 - iv. A letter indicating the source and amount of salary.

12. CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION OF TRAINING

- a. The PGME Office will issue certificates for fellows, signed by the Associate Dean, PGME and co-signed by the supervisor, following satisfactory completion of the fellowship program.
- b. Prior to issuance of the certificate, the program must submit a summary of the fellow's assessment to the PGME Office.
 - i. Summary submission should be at least four (4) weeks before the completion of training.
 - ii. Summary submission received less than four (4) weeks before the end of training may result in delayed issuance of certificate.
- c. The certificate will be issued for the fellowship title and category as indicated in the Letter of Engagement, unless there has been a formal written notification of change in category of fellowship (See Section 10).

13. PGME POLICIES THAT ARE APPLICABLE TO FELLOWSHIPS

The following University of Alberta PGME policies have been reviewed and deemed to be applicable (where content applies) to Fellowships at the University of Alberta:

- a. Information and Records Management Policy, PGME Records Destruction and Archiving Procedure
- b. PGME Retention Schedule for Residency and AFC programs
- c. Elective Approvals

DEFINITIONS

Definitions are listed in the sequence they occur in the document (i.e. not alphabetical).

Any definitions listed in the following table apply to this document only with no implied or intended institution-wide use.	
Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (RCPSC)	The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada is the national professional association that oversees the medical education of specialists in Canada.
Area of Focused Competence or AFC Fellowship	An Area of Focused Competence, or AFC, is a highly specialized discipline of specialty medicine that addresses a legitimate societal need but does not meet the Royal College criteria for a specialty, foundation program or subspecialty. An AFC fellowship is the fellowship training program that candidates undergo to obtain the AFC Diploma.
Professional Association of Resident Physicians of Alberta (PARA)	The Professional Association of Resident Physicians of Alberta represents resident physicians training in Alberta and holds the Resident Physician Agreement which describes the terms and conditions applicable to Resident Physicians related to provision of health care services within a learning environment.
CanMEDS	CanMEDS is a framework that identifies and describes the abilities physicians require to effectively meet the health care needs of the people they serve. These abilities are grouped thematically under seven roles.
College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta (CPSA)	The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta is responsible for the registration, regulation, and discipline of physicians, including PGME trainees such as resident physicians and fellows, in Alberta, Canada.