

Guide 1: Meeting training requirements for time-based programs

ISSUE

COVID-19 is a rapidly evolving situation that is causing uncertainty and disruption for medical education programs across Canada. To help support you, the Royal College has developed three documents regarding how programs may meet national standards in this disrupted training environment:

- Meeting training requirements for time-based programs (COVID-01-Time)
- Meeting training requirements for Competence by Design programs (COVID-02-CBD)
- Meeting training requirements for Areas of Focused Competence programs (COVID-03-AFC)

These guides aim to identify solutions, provide support, and emphasize where there is flexibility for programs, while also upholding national, discipline-specific standards.

TIME-BASED PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

Royal College training programs are required to meet national, discipline-specific standards. Residents in time-based training programs (i.e. those residency programs that have not yet implemented Competence by Design) must meet the standards outlined in the Specialty Training Requirements (STR) and Objectives of Training (OTR) documents in order to be eligible for the Royal College exam and for certification.

CHALLENGES POSED BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

We recognize that the impact of COVID-19 will be felt differently by each program, specialty, school, and region. Despite best efforts to maintain the educational mandate of programs, there may be time-based residents who, due to changes in patient load, resident redeployment, limitations to clinical activities or personal COVID-related illness, may have difficulty completing a portion of the requirements for training in the usual way.

PRINCIPLES FOR DECISION-MAKING IN A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

Solutions identified by your accredited programs will evolve alongside the pandemic. With this in mind, the following principles are offered to guide the decision-making of educational leaders during this period of rapid change.

1. **Safety comes first.** The personal health and safety of all trainees, faculty, volunteers, and administrative staff involved in postgraduate medical education will continue to come first.
2. **Patient care takes precedence.** Similarly, should the choice need to be made, the quality and safety of patient care will continue to take precedence over education and training during the pandemic.
3. **Maintain education activities, where possible.** The Royal College advocates for a continued balance between service provision and education for all trainees. We encourage programs to

maintain their education mandate to the best of their ability and the Royal College will work hard to support you in this task.

4. **Perfection is not the goal.** Adjusting to the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic will take time, patience, and flexibility. The Royal College will work with schools and training programs to provide help and support as scenarios arise and modifications are made.
5. **Graduating residents and trainees must be competent to practise unsupervised.** Trainees must continue to be held to a high standard and programs must have defensible evidence for their decisions to promote, graduate, or credential their trainees. As such, policies to pass and/or progress all trainees en masse during this time are not acceptable to the Royal College. Such policies conflict with the mission of postgraduate medical education in Canada and risk damaging the public's trust in our medical education system.
6. **The contributions trainees make to the COVID-19 situation may count towards their requirements.** While it may deviate from the training requirements prescribed by a discipline-specific committee, under proper supervision, alternate clinical activities that can be mapped to relevant requirements may be used in the achievement of competence.
7. **There is no 'one size fits all' solution.** Creative and flexible solutions will be required to ensure that trainees are competent and, as much as possible, stay on track to complete their training. While it is critical that all trainees meet the requirements of training, there will be flexibility as to *how* programs facilitate this via alternative training experiences and teaching during the pandemic.
8. **Documentation is critical.** The Royal College advises programs to document their decisions about alternate training activities during the pandemic. This documentation will help to keep a record of how trainees deviated from typical curriculum plans, as well as ensure that programs have defensible evidence of their decisions to progress a resident to certification or deem a trainee eligible for the FRCPC credential. These records will be reviewed during accreditation of the program, and will be considered as part of the program's accreditation status.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PROGRAM DIRECTORS

The Royal College understands that impacted residents may not meet the training experiences exactly as they are stipulated (i.e. duration of rotation, caseload, etc.). Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, should residents run into barriers in fulfilling the STR, there is flexibility for program directors to modify a resident's learning plan to meet the requirements. The goal is to provide, whenever possible and appropriate, alternative options for residents to achieve the objectives of training needed for independent practice. Most importantly, residents must acquire the established skill set of the discipline before certification.

Alternative training experiences

While they may deviate from a program's original curriculum plan, new clinical activities (including being deployed to another service to provide pandemic care) can be considered as an educational activity for residents and may be utilized to facilitate the achievement of the skill set of the discipline. The alternative experiences that program directors use to fulfil these objectives will require thoughtful consideration and must be:

- Implemented under appropriate supervision
- Relevant to the discipline
- Relevant to the objectives of training

For example, some off service residents have been redeployed to Internal Medicine ward teams and are taking on the role of communicating patient updates to family members. This deployment adds a valuable contribution to the ward team and an opportunity to enhance clinical and intrinsic CanMEDS Roles and skills in an off service environment.

Extension of training

Extension of training is only required when an essential training requirement is absolutely unavailable during the COVID-19 pandemic and the resident has no alternative method to demonstrate achievement of these time-based requirements prior to graduation. We expect these circumstances to be rare overall across all postgraduate programs, though there may be a few disciplines that may be more heavily impacted by COVID-19 related disruptions.

Program directors will be asked to consider a variety of factors when determining a resident's readiness for certification. If a program director believes that they will need to extend a resident's time in training in order to ensure requirements can be achieved, it is recommended that they refer to the Royal College's waiver of training policy, as well as discuss the extension with both their postgraduate dean and the Credentials Unit at the Royal College. In order to further assist programs in their consideration as to whether a resident is ready to graduate, the table below has been developed to guide decision-making (a flow chart can be found on *page 6*).

Summary of options for decision-making

	Residents mid-program	Residents near graduation
Training alternatives available	Residency Program Committee continues to receive evidence of the discipline-specific skill set achieved through relevant experiences. Alternative training activities recorded.	Residency Program Committee receives evidence of the discipline-specific skill set achieved through relevant experiences. Alternative training activities are recorded. Program Director provides attestation of competence for unsupervised practice to the Royal College based on the essential skill set of

	<p>Upcoming activities for next academic year are adjusted, as needed, to meet training needs (i.e., modified learning plan put in place).</p>	<p>the discipline and evidence collected.</p> <p>The Royal College has moved to a written examination process only for all (sub)specialties in 2020, due to the pandemic. With that change, the program director attestation takes on even greater importance in the certification process.</p>
<p>No training alternatives available</p>	<p>Residency Program Committee reviews situation and deploys residents to other activities during pandemic, as required. Reviews any available evidence.</p> <p>Upcoming activities for next academic year are adjusted, as needed to address remaining gap(s) in training (i.e., modified learning plan put in place).</p>	<p>The Residency Program Committee is encouraged to consider the overall picture of a resident's performance in their review.</p> <p>Residents cannot progress to graduation if they are missing a substantial portion and/or essential component of their requirements for training and may need to be set up for an extension of training.</p> <p>Key questions for the Residency Program Committee to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Did the resident experience disrupted training during an elective or an essential component of training? If so, the resident should not progress. - Did the resident experience exposure to the rotation or a comparable rotation (i.e., similar context, equivalent senior level of training) at another point in their training?

ATTESTING TO THE COMPETENCE OF GRADUATING RESIDENTS

Graduating residents must be competent to practise independently. As such, policies to simply pass and/or progress all residents during this time are not acceptable to the Royal College. Such policies conflict with the mission of postgraduate medical education in Canada and risk damaging the public's trust in our medical education system.

For time-based programs affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, program directors, in partnership with their postgraduate deans, will have the authority to sign off on the competence of graduating residents. This will attest that the candidate has the necessary clinical experiences and has achieved the required competencies for eligibility towards the Royal College examination. This re-affirmation is different than any already completed evaluation forms of the candidate's postgraduate medical education. This is an important attestation and confirmation of candidate's competencies with your

knowledge that the candidate will NOT be assessed with an applied (oral/OSCE/practical) exam by the Royal College.

In order to support this process, the Royal College advises programs to document their decisions within the resident's file and Residency Program Committee (RPC) files. This will help to keep a record of how residents deviated from typical curriculum plans, as well as ensure that programs have defensible evidence of and rationale for their decisions to graduate their residents.

The attestation procedure for time-based programs impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic includes the signing of a letter of re-affirmation (**COVID-01-Time_AttachmentA**). By signing, program directors attest that a candidate has had the necessary clinical experiences and has achieved the required competencies for eligibility towards the Royal College examination.

FLOW CHART: GUIDANCE ON THE EXTENSION OF TRAINING

