

A LITTLE CANADIAN CONTENT

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It's the end of a long week of early morning wake-ups. That all important morning cup of java is interrupted by a stream of long-winded 'ehs' and animated talk about last night's hockey game. This time the same mistake won't be made again by asking the individuals if they are from America. At this point it has been established—if they're Canadian, and studying in Ireland, you are about 90% correct in guessing that they are in Medicine! That's because Ireland is home to over 650 Canadian Medical students and we are spread all over the Emerald Isle.¹ We are a unique and growing community that certainly does not go unnoticed.

Canadian students frequently reflect on their decision to study at Trinity—in fact, we can't step foot into a taxi without being asked the million euro question, "So, why Ireland?" This question elicits many different responses but, after acknowledging how magical Ireland is and how much better the Guinness tastes here, the consensus stems from the inability in securing a spot in Medicine on Canadian soil.

While the desire to avidly pursue Medicine may bring us to Ireland in the first place, after experiencing Irish medical education it is clear why we remain here for as long as possible and why Irish graduates are highly sought after to fill residency spots back in North America. After five years of an Irish education, we return back to Canada as life-long adaptive learners with finesse in history taking and clinical examination, well above our Canadian peers.

Furthermore, the style of teaching is rooted with traditions of self-directed learning that ultimately produce physicians that are self-starters and who rely on their own drive to succeed.

Ireland becomes a second home to many of us, but the connection we feel with the country and community will not carry us past graduation as there are simply not enough internship spots for non-EU students. Therefore, short of holding an EU passport or marrying an Irish classmate, returning to North America appears to be the only option. Thinking that getting *into* medical school would be the hardest part, we quickly realize that it's only the beginning!

The preparation to becoming a good candidate for residency in North America can be exhaustive and stressful, but it is comforting to know that we have not been left alone to fend for ourselves. Trinity's Medical program has responded to the increasing proportion of international students by providing a number

of resources and dedicated staff for those unique students. However, despite these efforts, there was still a growing concern by Canadian students that the resources available did not specifically address our needs; North American students still lacked information about timelines and career planning. The hope to rectify the shortage of resources in these areas became the underlying motivation for the formation of CIMSA, an organization that would help Canadian Medical students pave their own way home.

The Canadian Irish Medical Students' Association, better known as CIMSA, is a student-run organization that was originally founded by students of the Royal College of Surgeons Ireland in 2007. CIMSA Trinity Chapter was established in 2009 and joined our colleagues at RCSI in an attempt to provide similar services, support, and helpful information to those studying at Trinity. Since its inception, the society as a whole has grown substantially, and now represents all Canadian students studying at the six Irish Medical colleges: National University of Ireland Galway, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, Trinity College Dublin, University College Cork, University College Dublin, and University of Limerick.

As each year passes and studying in Ireland becomes more popular, the proportion of Canadian students in the medical classes grows. As such, pertinent information on how to return to North America as a physician is an issue that grows with the Canadian community. CIMSA Trinity Chapter aims to make these resources available, while also liaising with the school of Medicine. Several projects have been initiated this academic year, with hopes that the Chapter will collect enough momentum to garner its own right as a College society. Our recent efforts have been very successful, with visits and presentations from representatives from Canadian programs, past alumni, and fellow students who are currently going through the process. Another big undertaking this year is 'Canuck Connect'. This initiative hopes to

address the needs of a growing number of students studying at Trinity. The objectives of this peer-based support programme are:

1. To connect Canadian (and American) students with other North American students in all academic years.
2. To provide information related to Canadian-specific issues—advice on observerships, electives, the matching process, and residency programs in North America.
3. To provide an opportunity to have questions answered by senior students who have been through the process.
4. To bring Canadian Trinity students together in a non-academic atmosphere, to share resources, and to network.

Now, you may ask, why has studying abroad, and specifically in Ireland, grown to be so popular in the last 5 years? According to a survey conducted in 2010, the majority (77.6%) choose to study abroad because they are unable to obtain a place in a Canadian Medical school and on average, apply 3 times before finally getting accepted.¹ Entering Medicine in Canada has always been a longstanding challenge, with an average of four qualified students per one spot at the 17 Canadian universities.¹ Deciding to obtain a medical degree abroad becomes very attractive, especially with the uncertainty that lies in Canada.

However, choosing Ireland is not simply for the love of the Irish rain. A number of factors contribute to the school/country choice including: reputation, likelihood of obtaining clerkship experiences in Canada, and the ability to enter Medicine from secondary school are listed as the top reasons for studying in Ireland.¹ Having recently spoken to Peter Nealon of the Atlantic Bridge Program (an application service for North Americans to the six Medical schools in Ireland), there is an increasing number of applicants for a growing number of spots, as new programs are being offered in Limerick and Galway. Currently, Irish

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Medical schools offer either a four year graduate entry program or a five/six year program that can be entered straight from secondary school. These options are respected Medical school programs that have inspired an increasing number of students to choose to study Medicine at Trinity and other schools abroad.

Although CIMSA's main focus is the population of Canadians studying Medicine in Ireland, the total number of Canadians Studying Abroad (CSA) could potentially play a role in returning home. The CSA count has doubled since the last survey in 2006 and it is approximated that there are 3500 Canadians studying at over 80 schools in 30 countries.¹ It is our hope that recognition of the ever-growing pool of competitive applicants studying in countries such as Ireland, the UK, and Australia will push Canada to address its present physician shortage, a problem that manifests as a doctor-patient ratio that is one of the lowest among industrialized nations. CIMSA can only hope that its efforts and growing number in the CSA community will help to resolve this Canadian problem.

Canadian graduates from Ireland are not the only students competing for a chance to work in Canada. Once we leave the country, Canadians applying for a training spot in Canada are placed in a much larger pool of International Medical Graduates (IMGs) that include CSAs and immigrant applicants. Even though residency programs in Canada offer a small percentage of their training seats to IMGs, the pool has grown substantially over the last few years, and will continue to do so in the years to come. In 2009, 52.5% of IMGs were successful in gaining a residency spot in Canada. Out of this pool, 22% were Canadian¹. This percentage will hopefully rise in subsequent years as more Canadians are graduating from schools abroad. There is an estimated 230% rise in CSA graduates from 2011 to 2012 alone.¹

Not all CSAs have the desire to return to Canada. While >90% hope to return to the land of poutine and maple syrup, a small percent-

age hope to train in the country they studied, and another large percentage aim to train in the USA and Australia. Main reasons for not immediately going back to Canada are the 'Return of Service' clauses that are often attached to IMG contracts. This is a large deterrent for returning graduates as it requires the individual to live and practice in a certain area for a specified amount of time following their training program. This clause places one in an area (often under-served) designated by their province, for a term equal and in addition to the duration of their training (2-5 years). Furthermore, many choose to train elsewhere due to the competitive nature of obtaining their desired residency program in Canada, whether it is Family Medicine, Internal Medicine, or Paediatrics (the top choices for residency in a recent survey).¹

So where does this leave Canadian, Irish Medical school graduates? After exhaustive analysis, there is a light at the end of the tunnel! Sandra Banner, Executive Director and CEO of the Canadian Residency Matching Service (CaRMS) visited Dublin in January 2010 to speak to and address the questions and concerns of the CIMSA community. She informed us that from previous matching data, the majority (>65%) of the IMG residency spots are filled by Irish grads, followed by Australian (>25%) and the Caribbean graduates.¹ With the help of people like Sandra Banner and the resources provided by CIMSA, Canadian Medical students studying around Ireland can experience the wonders of studying abroad while having a solid network that will help them succeed in acquiring their desired position in Medicine after life on the Emerald Isle.

For those interested in joining CIMSA or getting information pertinent to training in North America, please visit www.cimsa.ie or email us directly at cimsa.tcd@gmail.com.

References

1. http://www.carms.ca/pdfs/2010_CSA_Report/CaRMS_2010_CSA_Report.pdf