

Essential Skills and Abilities Required for the Study of Medicine

The learning objectives of Memorial University of Newfoundland, Faculty of Medicine, undergraduate program are designed to teach medical students to be physicians, and to provide learning experiences that will inspire all of its graduates to be prepared to practice medicine at the highest standards, serving all individuals and societies in the pursuit of health.

The Faculty of Medicine at Memorial, like other Faculties of Medicine in Canada, is 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. Therefore all students of medicine must possess the intellectual, ethical, physical, and emotional capabilities required to undertake and complete the curriculum and achieve the required levels of competence. 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 four years. Any request by a student with a disability for an extension of time to complete the degree program or any component of the medical school program, will be considered on a case by case basis.

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, which includes demonstrations and experiments in the basic science studies and in clinical studies. 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 both orally and in writing. A student must also be able to summarize coherently a patient's condition and management plan orally 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

Problem solving is the most critical skill demanded of physicians. 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

The Newfoundland and Labrador **Human Rights Code**, RSNL 1990 c. H-14, defines the terms physical disability and mental disability as follows:

“mental disability” means;

- (i) a condition of mental retardation or impairment,
- (ii) a learning disability, or a dysfunction in 1 or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language, or
- (iii) a mental disorder;

“physical disability” means any degree of infirmity, malformation or disfigurement of the body suffered by a person as a result of injury, illness or birth defect, and included a handicap resulting from epilepsy, paralysis, lack of co-ordination, amputation, blindness, deafness, muteness or reliance upon a dog guide, a wheelchair, a cane or crutch or other remedial appliance or device;

The Faculty of Medicine is committed to facilitating the integration of students with physical or mental disabilities into the University community, provided that the student can satisfy the Technical Standards. 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 or the goals of the medical education program which the Technical Standards address.

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.