



Licensing and Supervision

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Introduction

Welcome to the Recruitment Essentials module on Licensing and Supervision. Obtaining a license to practice in Ontario can be confusing and complicated. This module will help you better understand the licensing process for physicians in Ontario.

As a physician recruiter, you undoubtedly receive numerous CVs from physicians who are interested in joining your community, practice, or hospital. Sometimes a CV is straightforward and you are easily able to identify whether a physician is practice-ready. At other times, it is not always immediately identifiable whether a physician is practice-ready, based on the information contained in a CV. This can be the case if the physician is not trained or currently practising in Ontario. Knowing that your time is valuable, the Licensing and Supervision module was developed to help you identify potential licensing concerns and address any questions you have when reviewing submitted CVs. It has been designed to provide a broad overview of licensing in Ontario and to provide you with relevant resources and links to help you identify which physicians are practice-ready and which physicians may require licensing assistance.

Additionally, this module will discuss clinical supervision and its requirements, should a physician want to consider becoming a clinical supervisor. Offering supervision is a powerful recruitment tool and can be the deciding factor for a physician in choosing one community over another. Some practising physicians may worry that supervision is time-consuming and unrewarding. Our goal is to help physicians and communities better understand the roles, responsibilities, and rewards of being a clinical supervisor. Examples of supervision successes, along with testimonials from supervisors and supervisees, have been included to demonstrate how supervision can open up the pool of potential physician recruits in a community.

And always remember you are not alone! Whether you require assistance with identifying eligible physicians or need someone to answer your questions about supervision, a Regional Advisor (RA) at HealthForceOntario Marketing and Recruitment Agency (HFO MRA) is always available to assist.

Overview: Physician Training in Canada

To provide context to how physician licensing works, it helps to know what is required of a physician trained in Canada. As a general rule, physicians who aren't Canadian-trained must have a comparable background to qualify for a licence to practice in Ontario. By providing a baseline for comparison, it may help you understand what a physician may be missing if they are not eligible for a licence.

The path to producing a physician in Canada usually includes the following steps:

- 1. Undergraduate degree:** Canadians obtain an undergraduate university degree following high school. This is often in a scientific program.
- 2. Medical school:** Usually four years (some programs are condensed into three), leading to the granting of the Doctor of Medicine (MD) degree.
- 3. Postgraduate training:** Specialty-specific training in an area such as Family Medicine (2 to 3 years) or Orthopaedic Surgery (5 years or more). Students are often referred to as 'residents' while engaged in postgraduate training.
- 4. Entering practice:** At the successful completion of his/her medical training and passing the necessary exams (i.e. qualifying and certification exams), the physician obtains a licence and enters independent practice.

Exams 101: What are all of these Exams?

During the course of their training, medical students/residents in Canada take two types of exams. Both are required for a licence in most Canadian provinces/territories.

Qualifying Exams

These exams test general medical knowledge and clinical (patient) skills. All physicians, regardless of specialty, are required to take qualifying exams. Any physician with a medical degree is eligible to take them.

In Canada, qualifying exams are conducted by a national organization called the [Medical Council of Canada](#) and are called the Qualifying Examinations Parts 1 and 2. The [MCCQE1](#) is a one-day, computer-based test generally taken in the final year of medical school. The [MCCQE2](#) is a clinical test using standardized patients, usually taken in the first or second year of residency. When a physician has passed both parts of the MCCQE, he/she is awarded a designation called the Licentiate of the [Medical Council of Canada \(LMCC\)](#).

It is important to remember that in Canada, qualifying exams alone are not sufficient for a licence. In the past, physicians could qualify for a licence upon the completion of these exams. However, since the 1990s, specialty certification (see the following section) has also been required.

Did you know?

The U.S. requires a similar set of exams called the [United States Medical Licensing Examinations \(USMLEs\)](#).

Certification Exams

The second type of exam taken by Canadian physicians is the specialty certification exam. Certification exams test a physician's knowledge and clinical skills in his/her area of postgraduate training (residency/fellowship). Surgery, Psychiatry, and Internal Medicine are examples of specialties. Family Medicine is considered a specialty in both Canada and the U.S.

In Canada, two organizations offer specialty certification exams: the [College of Family Physicians of Canada \(CFPC\)](#) for family physicians; and the [Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada \(RCPC\)](#) for all other specialists.

Specialty certification exams are much more difficult to access than qualifying exams. To be eligible for RCPC or CFPC, normally physicians must have completed training in a country with a similar training program (the same is true for writing U.S. board exams). When foreign-trained physicians are not eligible for a licence, it is often because they are not eligible for certification exams.

Did you know?

In the U.S., each specialty has its own board, for example the [American Board of Family Medicine](#) and the [American Board of Psychiatry & Neurology](#). When a physician passes the certification exam, they are board-certified. Board certification is comparable to specialty certification from the CFPC or RCPC.

Who is Eligible for the Royal College Exams?

The main way for physicians to become certified as a specialist in Canada is by writing and passing the Royal College exam. To be eligible, a physician must have completed a residency program that is equivalent to the Canadian program, in one of the following Royal College-approved jurisdictions:

- | | | | | |
|-------------|-------------|---------------|----------------|------------------|
| • Canada | • Hong Kong | • New Zealand | • South Africa | • United States |
| • Australia | • Ireland | • Singapore | • Switzerland | • United Kingdom |

How Does a Physician Obtain Family Medicine Certification in Canada?

The [College of Family Physicians of Canada \(CFPC\)](#) offers two routes to certification: certification by examination and certification without examination.

There are two ways to become eligible to take the CFPC certification exams: practice eligibility and residency eligibility.

Practice eligibility applies to physicians with family practice experience in Canada – they must currently be in full-time practice for a period of at least two years and have successfully completed the Medical Council of Canada Qualifying Exam Part 1 (MCCQE1). Many foreign physicians pursue practice eligibility. Note: unlike some other provinces, Ontario licensing requirements do not allow physicians to acquire this experience in Ontario.

Residency eligibility requires that a physician has recently completed family practice residency in one of the following CFPC-approved countries, and have successfully completed the Medical Council of Canada Qualifying Exam Part 1 (MCCQE1):

- | | | | | |
|--------|---------------|-----------|---------|----------------|
| Canada | United States | Australia | Ireland | United Kingdom |
|--------|---------------|-----------|---------|----------------|

Certification without examination is available to physicians who have completed Family Medicine training and certification exams in one of the above countries.

Did you know?

In the spring of 2013, a new and enhanced format for the Family Medicine certification exam was introduced. Upon successful completion, candidates will be granted certification in Family Medicine (CCFP) and the Licentiate of the Medical Council of Canada (LMCC).

Licensing: The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario (CPSO)

Role of the CPSO

The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario (CPSO) is the body that regulates the practice of medicine in Ontario. It is authorized by provincial statute to play this role. One of the CPSO's main functions is issuing 'certificates of registration' (licenses) to physicians who meet certain requirements. In addition to licensing physicians, the CPSO also monitors and maintains standards of practice through peer assessment, investigations, and other measures, and takes disciplinary action where required.

Types of Licences: Independent vs. Restricted

The CPSO is authorized to issue several classes of licences, including:

- Independent Practice Certificates (independent licences);
- Restricted Certificates (restricted licences);
- Academic Practice Certificates (for clinical professors working and teaching in academic environments); and
- Postgraduate Education Certificates (for post-graduate trainees – residents, fellows).

From a recruitment perspective, you will be looking most often for physicians who are eligible for **independent or restricted** licences. There are several differences between them.

An independent licence is the *holy grail* for physicians and recruiters. Physicians with an independent licence have no restrictions on their licence, except that they must practice only in areas in which they are educated or experienced.

Eligibility Requirements: Independent Registration

The CPSO and other provinces have agreed on a national standard for independent registration. The requirements for an independent licence reflect what a physician trained in Canada would typically have:

- A medical degree from an approved school;
- The Licentiate of the Medical Council of Canada (completion of the MCC Qualifying Exams);
- Specialist certification from the CFPC or Royal College;
- A minimum of 1 year of practice experience or training in Canada; and
- Status to work in Canada (citizenship, permanent residence or a work permit).

Did you know?

There is one other way to qualify for an independent licence with the CPSO. Under a federal-provincial labour mobility agreement called the Agreement on Internal Trade (AIT), a physician with an independent licence in one province may be eligible for an independent licence in other provinces. AIT is a better option for family physicians than for specialists.

The AIT is not actually a CPSO registration policy, but a federal-provincial agreement that includes provisions for labour mobility between provinces. Under AIT, a physician with an *independent* licence in one province is eligible for an independent licence in another province. However, there is also a provision in AIT that physicians with a *restricted* licence in one province *may* be eligible for registration in others, if a comparable licence with similar restrictions exists.

Restricted Registration

The CPSO issues restricted certificates under a variety of policies. A *restricted* licence means that there are terms and conditions on a physician's licence. These may include:

- Supervision: the physician is required to be supervised by another physician for a period of time.
- Restricted mobility: the physician is authorized to work in a specific location(s) and must obtain approval from the CPSO to change or add a practice location.
- Scope of practice definition: the physician is authorized by the CPSO to practice within a specific specialty area or practice environment.

Unlike independent registration, there are various scenarios in which a physician might be eligible for a restricted licence with the CPSO. The CPSO has approved a number of registration policies for physicians who don't meet all the independent licence requirements at the time of application, or who have training and credentials from similar jurisdictions.

As a recruiter, you would most likely be looking for candidates who are eligible for a licence under the policies listed in the next section.

CPSO Registration Policies

Pathways 3 and 4

The Pathways are registration policies introduced by the CPSO in 2008. They provide a route to registration for physicians who have:

- Successfully completed a residency program in the U.S. that is accredited by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME);
- Successfully completed all the USMLE exams; and
- Successfully completed the board exam in their specialty (eligibility to write the exam does not count).

The only significant difference between **Pathway 3** and **Pathway 4** is where candidates attended medical school: Pathway 3 is for graduates of medical schools in Canada or the U.S. (known as 'domestic graduates'); while Pathway 4 is for graduates of international medical schools.

Pathways 3 and 4 do not require physicians to take any Canadian exams. Their eligibility for a CPSO licence is based on their U.S. training and exams, which are considered roughly equivalent to the Canadian versions.

The Pathways 3 and 4 Process

- The applicant receives a restricted licence.
- Clinical supervision is required for a defined period of 12 to 18 months.
- After the supervision period, the CPSO conducts a practice assessment (paid for by the physician requiring supervision).
- At the completion of this process, the physician will indefinitely have a restricted licence, but is authorized for independent practice (known informally as a 'full licence') within a defined specialty scope. All other restrictions are lifted.

Restricted Certificate of Registration for Exam Eligible Candidates

The Restricted Certificates of Registration policy applies to physicians who are in the process of completing Canadian exams (Royal College, CFPC and/or MCC exams). They must have confirmation of eligibility to be considered under this policy (an example is a ruling letter from the Royal College). A recruiter may come across this scenario in the case of a recent graduate from a Canadian residency program who was not successful on his/her first attempt at the Royal College exam.

Under this policy, the applicant receives a restricted licence. Supervision is required until the applicant completes the missing exams (to a maximum of 3 years).

Acceptable Qualifying Examinations Policy

As discussed previously, one of the CPSO's licence requirements is the completion of the Medical Council of Canada Qualifying Examinations (MCCQE). An exception to this is the [Acceptable Qualifying Examinations \(AQE\)](#) policy, which allows for the substitution of the MCCQE examinations with certain other comparable examinations (such as the USMLE). Only the U.S. and Canada require qualifying examinations; therefore, acceptable substitutes are current or former Canadian or American exams.

Alternatives are not accepted completely at par. The AQE policy involves a process similar to Pathways 3 and 4, including 12 to 18 months of clinical supervision, a practice assessment, and graduation to a 'full' licence.

Recognition of CFPC Certification without Examination Policy

As noted earlier, the College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC) offers certification without examination to physicians who have completed training and Family Medicine certification exams in approved countries (currently the U.S., Australia, Ireland, and the U.K). The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario (CPSO) recognizes this form of certification. Qualifying examinations are also required by the CPSO. Candidates receive either restricted or independent licences, depending on which qualifying exams they have completed and other factors.

Some Notes about Registration Policies

This list includes only a small sample of the CPSO's registration policies. However, these are the ones most commonly used by physicians coming to Ontario from other parts of Canada or from the U.S. or other similar countries.

Many physicians have more than one option. For example, physicians coming from the U.S. might have the choice of Pathway 3 (based on their U.S. training and exams) or the Restricted Certificates of Registration policy (if they decided to take Canadian exams).

The following are some common scenarios you might encounter as a recruiter, along with the policies which might apply:

Scenario 1: A family physician or specialist who completed training in Canada:

- If the candidate has not yet completed the MCC and/or CFPC/RCPSC exams, apply under the [Restricted Certificates of Registration Policy](#) as an interim step.

Scenario 2: A family physician or specialist who completed training and exams in the US:

- Apply under [Pathway 3](#) or Pathway 4, if the candidate has completed the USMLE and board exams.
- Apply to take the Canadian exams (MCC and CFPC/RCPSC); apply to CPSO under the [Restricted Certificates of Registration Policy](#) as an interim step.*
- Take the CFPC/RCPSC exam; substitute the USMLE exams for the MCC exams under the [Acceptable Qualifying Examinations](#) policy.

Scenario 3: A family physician in practice elsewhere in Canada:

- Apply to take the CFPC exams as a practice-eligible candidate. Apply to CPSO under the Restricted Certificates of Registration Policy, once eligible.*
- Apply under the Agreement on Internal Trade (for independent or restricted registration, depending on the licence in the candidate's current province)

Scenario 4: A family physician with training from Ireland, the U.K., or Australia:

- Apply for certification without exam from the CFPC, then apply to the CPSO under the Recognition of CFPC Certification Without Examination Policy (will also have to take MCC exams, in which case the Restricted Certificates of Registration Policy would also be involved)
- Apply to take the CFPC examinations; apply under the Restricted Certificates of Registration Policy, once eligible.*

*Note: due the format changes in 2013, physicians will require successful completion of the MCCQE1 in order to be eligible for the certification exam in Family Medicine.

Scenario 5: A specialist physician with training from a Royal College-approved jurisdiction:

- Apply to the Royal College for a letter of eligibility; then apply to the CPSO under the Restricted Certificates of Registration Policy, while undertaking Royal College and MCC exams.

Each person's background and needs are unique. If you have any questions about CPSO policies, talk to your Regional Advisor (RA).

How to Read a Physician CV

As a community recruiter, you likely receive many CVs from physicians interested in your job postings. It's not always easy to tell who is eligible for registration with the CPSO or what licence restrictions might be imposed.

Each person's background and qualifications are unique. However, there are certain things you can look for in a CV to help you determine whether an applicant is CPSO-ready or not.

Identifying CPSO-Eligible Physicians

Physicians who may be CPSO-eligible and therefore represent a pool you can recruit from, include:

- Physicians currently in practice or training in the U.S.;
- Physicians currently in practice or residency in Ontario or other Canadian provinces; and
- Physicians in practice or training in other CFPC or Royal College-recognized jurisdictions:

- | | | | | |
|-------------|-------------|---------------|----------------|------------------|
| • Canada | • Hong Kong | • New Zealand | • South Africa | • United States |
| • Australia | • Ireland | • Singapore | • Switzerland | • United Kingdom |

Other Applicants: What to Look For in a CV

You may also receive CVs from physicians who are not yet eligible for a licence. Some clues to look for include:

- The physician has taken MCC exams only; his/her CV does not include reference to CFPC, Royal College, or American board certification exams.
- The applicant's current home address is in Ontario and he/she is not currently practicing as a physician. This can be determined by using the [doctor search](#) on the CPSO website.
- The physician is currently doing a fellowship at an Ontario university, but his/her previous training was not in a Royal College or CFPC-approved jurisdiction.

Physicians not currently eligible for a CPSO licence can be referred to the [HFO MRA Access Centre](#). The Access Centre provides a wide range of services and information to internationally educated physicians and other health professionals.

Once again, each person is unique and it's best to get a second opinion if you are not familiar with the CPSO requirements. If you have a potential recruit, your RA or PRA is available to help you by assessing your candidate's eligibility for CPSO registration. You are not alone!

- Find your [Regional Advisor \(RA\)](#)

Supervision

We learned earlier in the module that some physicians require supervision as a condition of their CPSO licence. While supervision does require physician resources, it can be especially effective for a community which wants to recruit. Physicians in your community are able to provide supervision, it can increase your pool of potential physicians for recruitment. Furthermore, the mentoring aspect can be rewarding for the local physician, adding another dimension to his or her work. Familiarity with supervision is therefore very important for physician recruiters.

The following information may help you understand what is involved in CPSO-required supervision.

Reasons for Supervision

There are a variety of reasons why the CPSO might require that a physician be supervised. As stated on the CPSO website:

- A physician is missing qualifications for full registration;
- An assesment or investigation of the physician's practice identifies the need for practice enhancements and/or identifies patient safety concerns;
- Supervision is part of an interim order pending a discipline hearing;
- A physician has a health issue that needs to be monitored; or
- A physician requires supervision as part of a series of steps towards returning to practice after a defined absence, or is changing their scope of practice.

The CPSO's Guidelines for Supervision identify different types of supervision: Clinical Preceptorship, Clinical Supervision, Practice Monitoring, and Health Monitoring. Each is specific to different types of situations.

From a recruitment perspective, **Clinical Supervision** is the most relevant category. Your potential recruits may be applying under one of the registration policies described above. Supervision is required under these policies because their qualifications are not complete. For example, a physician may not have completed his/her exams or have any experience in the Canadian health-care system. Or, he/she may come from another jurisdiction where the licensing requirements are somewhat different. In such cases, the CPSO requires that the potential recruit find a supervisor to guide him/her through an initial period of practice in Ontario.

Who can be a Supervisor?

The CPSO's eligibility requirements for clinical supervisors include:

- Independent registration with the CPSO;
- Currently in practice in Ontario;
- A minimum of five (5) consecutive years in practice in the same functional scope of practice as the supervisee;
- Experience in, or willingness to learn about, evaluation of other physicians; and
- No real or perceived conflict of interest.

Ideally, supervisor and supervisee practice at the same location and this enhances the supervision arrangement by allowing for daily contact. However, it is possible for a supervisor to work elsewhere under certain circumstances, which might include the supervisor agreeing to visit the supervisee's practice location at regular intervals.

¹ "Guidelines for College-Directed Supervision," The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, accessed May 12, 2014, <http://www.cpso.on.ca/Policies-Publications/CPGs-Other-Guidelines/Other-Guidelines/Guidelines-for-College-Directed-Supervision/Guidelines-for-College-Directed-Supervision-%281%29>

Length of Supervision

Supervision can be for an open-ended period or a defined period. How long a recruit will require supervision depends on his/her situation and under which registration policy the recruit applied.

For example, Pathways 3 and 4 (for physicians with U.S. training and exams) require clinical supervision for a period of 12 to 18 months. However, under the Restricted Certificates of Registration policy, the duration of supervision could be long or short, depending on how many exams must be completed and how soon they will be taken. Usually a physician has up to three (3) years to complete outstanding exams.

It is important to know that a supervisor is allowed to end the supervision requirement if needed. It is also possible to propose arrangements in which the responsibility for supervision is shared. Supervisor teams are acceptable, as are 'relay' arrangements in which supervision is handed off after a set period. A "back-up" supervisor is also required for instances where the primary supervisor is unavailable.

Levels of Supervision

There are three levels of Clinical Supervision: low, moderate, and high. Most new CPSO registrants require low or moderate level supervision.

In determining which level of supervision is appropriate, the CPSO considers a variety of risk factors, including:

- The applicant's training and credentials;
- The applicant's independent practice experience (if any);
- The applicant's experience in the Canadian health-care system (if any);
- The level of risk associated with the applicant's specialty;
- The level of support the applicant will have in his/her practice/community; and
- The applicant's practice background: clinical performance, conduct, or other issues.

Typical Supervision Arrangement (low level)

A typical low-level clinical supervision arrangement includes the following:

- Monthly meetings between the supervisor and supervisee, at a specified location, at which the supervisor answers questions and provides guidance and recommendations. Bi-weekly meetings may be required at the beginning;
- Medical record review (at the monthly meetings) - approximately 10 charts, selected by supervisor and supervisee;
- Supervisor availability (by phone or email) in case questions arise; and
- Twice-yearly reporting to the CPSO.

Another supervision tool is direct observation, in which the supervisor observes the supervisee with patients for a specified period (such as two days or one week) at the start of the arrangement. Direct observation is occasionally required for low level supervision.

Typical Supervision Arrangement (moderate level)

Moderate-level supervision is very similar to the low-level arrangement described above. Key differences between low-level and moderate-level supervision would be more frequent meetings, additional reporting (four times per year, for example) and some initial direct observation may be required.

The Supervision Proposal

The supervisor's responsibility starts with completing the CPSO Supervision Arrangement form in support of his/her supervisee's licence application. The completed form should provide as much detail as possible about the specific arrangement being proposed. Some points which should be covered in Section B – Details of the Supervision Arrangement (or in a separate letter if needed) include:

- The name and specialty of the applicant;
- The name of the clinic, hospital, or practice the applicant is joining;
- A timeframe of when the supervisory arrangement is expected to start;
- A description of the practice or department where the applicant will practice;
- Details about the applicant's proposed practice in Ontario;
- The applicant's background and under which policy he/she is applying;
- The title, qualifications, and supervisory background of the supervisor; and
- Specific details about the supervision arrangement (frequency of meetings, chart reviews, etc.).

Link to CPSO website for Supervision Arrangement Form:

http://www.cpso.on.ca/uploadedFiles/registration/applicationsforms/Supervision_Arrangement.pdf

If you need any help preparing the documents, contact your [Regional Advisor](#) for assistance.

Resources

- [Physicians](#)
- [Recruitment Essentials](#)
- [College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario \(CPSO\)](#)
 - [Doctor Search](#)
 - [Registration](#)
 - [Registration Policies](#)
 - [Guidelines for Supervision](#)
- [College of Family Physicians of Canada \(CFPC\)](#)
 - [Certification by exam](#)
 - [Certification without exam](#)
- [Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada \(RCPSC\)](#)
 - [Approved jurisdiction training](#)
- [Medical Council of Canada \(MCC\)](#)
 - [Evaluating Exam \(EE\)](#)
 - [Qualifying Exam Part 1 \(QE1\) and](#)
 - [Qualifying Exam Part 2 \(QE2\)](#)
- [Foundation for Advancement of International Medical Education and Research \(FAIMER\)](#)
- [HealthForceOntario Marketing and Recruitment Agency \(HFO MRA\)](#)

For more information or questions,
please contact your local Regional Advisor:

www.healthforceontario.ca/ra

Available in accessible format upon request: www.HealthForceOntario.ca/acs

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