

NEWSLETTER

Vol. 5, Issue 1
May 2016



- CITAC Annual General Meeting
- Clinician-Scientist Consensus Conference
- Update on Training Funding Advocacy

FOCUS: Social Media.

CITAC is now on social media! We started with Twitter and Facebook. We really want to stay in touch with you and let you know what we are up to. Remember to **LIKE** us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter. If you miss us, feel free to **POKE**; and we will surely **HUG** you back. Our next step will be revamping the main website and integrating social media to the page. Stay tuned!

Ellen Zhang (VP Internal Elect)

Incoming President

After completing a Bachelor of Science, I entered medical school at the University of Manitoba. During my first year I shadowed an oncologist and realized the great impact that research had on patient management. I decided to pursue to the MD/PhD program. My project focuses on identifying novel tumor biomarkers using high-resolution imaging. I am currently in the clerkship part of my training, and finalizing my thesis work. This is my fifth year as part of the CITAC governance; previously I was CITAC Vice-President External and Secretary.

As President, I look forward to representing and advocating on behalf of Canadian clinician-scientist trainees. My vision is for CITAC to be an evidence-based global voice and resource for clinician-scientist trainees.

Alexandra Kuzyk

President, CITAC/ACCFC
MD/PhD Candidate, University of Manitoba



Message from the President

The Clinician Investigator Trainee Association of Canada membership continues to grow. Our voice and influence also continues to grow and strengthen.

The 2015 CITAC AGM was held in Toronto in conjunction with the University of Toronto CIP Symposium. The theme was “It Takes a Village” and focused on career development pathways, skill-building workshops and a networking atmosphere. The atten-

dance was the highest yet with over 160 registrants. We also had over 25 workshop leaders and guest speakers that contributed to the conference’s success. We hope to see you all again at the 2016 AGM from November 21 – 23 in Toronto!

Last year clinician-scientist training in Canada was faced with adversity when MD/PhD program funding cuts were announced. However, CITAC rose to action. In our advocacy efforts

we met and collaborated with funding agencies, government and health policy officials, and fellow stakeholder organizations.

“Last year clinician-scientist training in Canada was faced with adversity ... However, CITAC rose to action.”

We began a petition that generated over 700 signatures. We were also



invited to speak about the Canadian Trainee Experience at the FMEC PG Clinician-Scientist Consensus Conference held in February 2016 at Western University (see additional article in newsletter for more information).

This year we have many exciting new and ongoing projects. One of my initiatives is to establish a Canadian database for clinician-scientist alumni outcomes. In a collaborative effort, we have created and distributed a survey to all Canadian MD/PhD program alumni to gather nationwide outcome data. We are also collecting data on current program demographics, trainee needs, mentorship opportunities and international clinician-scientist training programs.

Another one of my initiatives for this year is to create a stronger community presence and unified voice for Canadian clinician-scientist trainees. CITAC is re-vamping our social media presence! We hope that you will join us on

Facebook and Twitter to network, ask questions, and share advice, accomplishments, opportunities and interesting articles with each other. Trainees have voiced concern about the variability in program structure, funding, integration of clinical and research components and mentorship. We have brought this concern to the attention of program directors and are working with them to generate best practices and new opportunities. We are also collaborating with the American Physician-Scientist Association to conduct an international survey of MD/PhD trainees; four countries are already on-board with the hope to generate international best practice guidelines.

This is an exciting and industrious time for CITAC. I look forward to working with you all this year!



SOCIAL MEDIA LINKS

-  citac-accfc.org
-  [@CITAC_ACCFC](https://twitter.com/CITAC_ACCFC)
-  facebook.com/CITACACCFC

YOUR EXECUTIVE TEAM

- President** **Alex Kuzyk**
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Clinician-Scientist Consensus Conference

Alexandra Kuzyk - President, CITAC

From February 21 – 23, 2016, a meeting was held at Western University to discuss and generate recommendations for sustainable clinician-scientist training in Canada. Attendees included Canadian MD/PhD and CIP program directors and Faculty of Medicine deans; there were also representatives from American, Australian and European programs, AFMC, CAHS, CFPC, CIHR, CITAC, HealthCareCan and the Royal College. Talks were given on current best practices in Canada and internationally, the CIHR roadmap and the Canadian trainee experience (a talk I gave on behalf of CITAC). Key discussion topics included recruitment into medical school, scholarship in the

training program, mentorship in early faculty, postgraduate scholarship training program, and the role of interdisciplinary research teams.

I am proud to say that the trainee voice was definitely heard and informed the meeting's discussions.

The conference was a success with stimulating conversation throughout and the production of actionable recommendations. Key points included program flexibility, integration of medical and research program components, the importance of mentorship,

the metrics of success, and the culture of research in medicine. I am proud to say that the trainee voice was definitely heard and informed the meeting's discussions. The recommendations clearly state the value and unique position of the clinician-scientist to improve health care for Canadians. They state we must create an independent, federally-sponsored council to sustain the clinician-scientist workforce in a cohesive and nationally standardized manner. They also state we must develop a national strategy for funding from the undergraduate to early career time points. The steering committee is continuing to develop the recommendations into a white paper.

Update on Trainee Funding Advocacy

Patrick Steadman - Policy Chair, CITAC

As a member of CITAC, you know the central role evidence-based decision making takes in our clinical and scientific endeavours. This standard extends to training clinician-scientists as well. Since CIHR's removal of the MD-PhD program grants¹ in the summer 2015, CITAC has been working hard meeting with program directors, CIHR and other funding agencies, as well as initiating the necessary studies to ensure future policy reflects the evidence.

Information from CIHR's Strategy on Patient Oriented Research (SPOR) indicates that the long term plan was to move the MD-PhD program funding under the SPOR umbrella². However, we are now 9 months since CIHR announced the cuts, and SPOR funding is still not in place. In discussions with CIHR representatives, concerns have been raised on how well MD-PhD programs train clinician-scientists. There is overwhelming evidence in the United States that MD-PhD programs which provide funding for trainees, not only help leverage additional funding, but also produce clinician-scientists at a very high return-on-investment rate (66% of MD-PhD trainees become clinician-scientists)³. The evidence is clear in the US, and likely Canada is on par. The Canadian programs are relatively young and CIHR's decision to remove funding has happened before the Canadian data has been acquired and analyzed. Therefore, CITAC has set out to establish evidence on how well Canadian programs are doing and to ensure these programs are funded in the future.

CITAC along with students from UBC and the Canadian Society for

Clinical Investigation (CSCI) have initiated a study to assess outcomes of Canadian MD-PhD program graduates. This should clarify how well Canadian programs are at producing clinician-scientists and allow for comparison to other nations including the US. This work is ongoing and we hope to complete it later this summer. In addition, MD-PhD program directors are working on research regarding the cost of MD-PhD program administration within Canada and plan to publish once complete.

“MD-PhD programs which provide funding, not only help leverage more funding, but also produce clinician-scientists at a very high rate”

CITAC members have also met with SPOR representatives in various provinces to work on creating funds for MD-PhD programs on a provincial basis (as this is how the SPOR units are operated). This, we hope, is a temporary strategy. Ultimately, CITAC believes MD-PhD program

funding must be national and continue to fund programs, not individual students. The funding should be merit-based on program outcomes and encourage regional flexibility, and integration in clinical and research training.

CITAC is in the process of outlining our official position for MD-PhD program funding, following our open letter from the Fall of 2015, which will establish a framework we hope to see incorporated in future funding programs.

References

1. Webster, P. C. CIHR cutting MD/PhD training program. *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 187, (2015).
2. External Advisory Committee Report: Training and Career Development in Patient-Oriented Research. Government of Canada, Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Research and Knowledge Translation, at <http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/47693.html>
3. Brass, L. F. et al. Are MD-PhD Programs Meeting Their Goals? An Analysis of Career Choices Made by Graduates of 24 MD-PhD Programs. *Academic Medicine* 1 (2010). doi:10.1097/acm.0b013e3181d3ca17

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Kirill Zaslavsky for careful review of this article.

