British Columbia Ministry of Health

Competitive Stream

Physician Return of Service Program

Policy for Specialty Medicine Participants

Labour, Negotiations and Beneficiary Services Division

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Preamble

British Columbia's Postgraduate Medical Education Competitive Stream and its associated Return of Service requirement is a patient-focused initiative. This program supports access to the publicly funded health care system for B.C. residents.

The Competitive Stream program is part of the B.C. Government's broader commitment and investment in expanding medical education opportunities to train more physicians for B.C.

The Competitive Stream provides participants with an opportunity to train and qualify as physicians in B.C. The Competitive Stream accepts applications from International Medical Graduates (IMGs) and Canadian Medical Graduates (CMGs). IMGs are a diverse group of Canadian citizens and permanent residents who have completed their medical education at medical schools outside of Canada. CMGs completed their medical education at medical schools in Canada. Both IMGs and CMGs are important members of B.C.'s health workforce.

All prospective participants for Competitive Stream Residency positions apply through the Canadian Resident Matching Service (CaRMS). Accepting a Competitive Stream residency position via CaRMS is a legal agreement and requires executing the applicable Return of Service contract.

Policy Objectives

To serve as a companion document to the Return of Service contract for Competitive Stream participants and prospective participants.

Policy Updates

The Ministry of Health may update this policy from time to time. Notice of updates will be provided to active Competitive Stream Return of Service participants.

Intent

To outline the roles and responsibilities of the participants, health authorities, and the Ministry of Health within the Competitive Stream Program in alignment with the Return of Service contract and policy definitions.

1.1.1 Roles

The Ministry of Health:

- funds a designated number of medical residency positions as part of the Competitive Stream;
- oversees Return of Service programs at a provincial level;
- confirms proposed placements under the Competitive Stream placement process;
- sets expectations that apply to participants across B.C.; and
- has final approval on Return of Service documents.

The health authorities:

- facilitate the participant's Return of Service placement; and
- are a party to the approved addendum.

The participant:

- receives a residency position at the University of British Columbia (UBC), and in exchange must sign a Return of Service contract with the Ministry of Health (this contract is a legal agreement and warrants independent legal advice);
- upon completion of residency, applies for licensure with the College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC;
- proposes placements under the Competitive Stream placement process;
- provides government-funded health services for a three-year term that begins after residency completion; and
- completes their Return of Service in B.C.

1.1.2 Definitions

As aligned with the Competitive Stream Return of Service Contract, definitions in this policy are:

(a) "**Addendum**" or "**Return of Service Addendum**" means the Addendum appended as Schedule 2 in the Contract as a template;

(b) **"Approved Addendum**" means an Addendum that has been filled out and executed by the Participant and Health Authority, and then approved by the Province, which contains the terms and conditions of the Return of Service Placement;

(c) "**Contract**" or "**Return of Service Contract**" means the contract that is signed by the Ministry of Health and the Participant in exchange for the Participant receiving a Competitive Stream Residency position;

(d) "**Eligible Practice Region**" means all B.C. communities outside the City of Vancouver, British Columbia which is Health Service Delivery Area 32 and includes City Centre, Centre North, Northeast, Westside, Midtown, and South Vancouver;

(e) "**Full-Time Basis**" means as described in the Approved Addendum, but must include a minimum number of hours per year of patient care providing Government-Funded Health Services for the duration of the Return of Service Term with hours distributed over each year of the term;

(f) "**Government-Funded Health Services**" means insured health services as benefits under the Medical Services Plan or an alternative payment arrangement through either the Province or the Health Authority, plus other services that are incidental to such a practice such as services insured by WorkSafe BC, filling out forms for employment purposes, etc. For clarity, this excludes not medically necessary services such as uninsured cosmetic, aesthetic, or enhanced lifestyle services;

(g) "**Health Authority**" means the regional health board designated under the *Health Authority Act*, RSBC 1996, c.180, the Provincial Health Services Authority, the First Nations Health Authority, or Providence Health Care, to which the Participant will complete their Return of Service in a Placement;

(h) "**Ministry of Health**" or "**Province**" means Government of British Columbia as represented by the Minister of Health and is a party to the Contract as the Province and approves the Addendum;

(i) "**Offer Letter**" means a letter from a medical clinic or Health Authority offering the Participant a Return of Service Placement;

(j) "**Participant**" means the individual that matches to a Competitive Stream Residency position and is party to the Contract;

(k) "**Placement**" means the medical clinic or facility in which the Participant practises medicine in accordance with the terms of the Contract for the Return of Service Term;

(l) "**Postgraduate Medical Education**" means the residency positions that the Province funds in exchange for a Return of Service obligation, including the Residency position that the Participant is receiving in exchange for agreeing to the terms of the Contract and any advanced training for the Participant;

(m) "**Repayment Amount**" means the repayment amount defined in the Contract and that the Participant must pay to the Province if the Ministry of Health terminates the Contract (including due to the Participant breaching the Return of Service or other obligations under the Contract);

(n) "**Residency**" means the Participant's Postgraduate Medical Education residency position;

(o) "**Return of Service**" means the Return of Service described in the Contract which requires the Participant to provide Government-Funded Health Services in a Placement for the Return of Service Term; and

(p) "**Return of Service Term**" means the duration the Participant must provide a Return of Service on a Full-Time Basis, which is set out in the Contract and is a three-year term for a specialty medicine Participant.

Intent

To outline the approach for Contract amendment by written agreement where required, including amending the Approved Addendum.

1.2.1 Approved Addendum amendments

Either the Participant or the Health Authority may request a change to the Approved Addendum, and both must agree to the change. Changes to the Approved Addendum are amendments to the Contract, and prior approval from the Ministry of Health must be obtained before such changes are undertaken. A modification agreement would be executed to finalize the change and, if approved, would be signed by the Participant and the Health Authority and approved by the Ministry of Health.

1.2.2 Change of program

The Ministry of Health maintains the integrity and principles of the CaRMS match, upholds the CaRMS match results including a Participant's clinical discipline, and defers to UBC's program transfer policy.

Postgraduate Medical Education program transfers are an extraordinary circumstance and have impact on the Return of Service Contract. The Ministry of Health may support a Participant's Postgraduate Medical Education program change in relation to the Return of Service, reviewed on a case-by-case basis and depending on factors such as alignment with physician workforce need and funding availability. It is UBC's determination whether to offer the supported program transfer to the Participant.

In the event of a Participant's program transfer, the Contract remains, and the Ministry of Health may require an amendment to the Contract terms. As applicable, this Contract amendment may include changes such as the specified clinical discipline, the Return of Service Term length, the location of the Return of Service, updates to the Repayment Amount, and other discipline specific terms.

Intent

To outline the impact of a Participant's leave during their Residency or Return of Service Term.

2.1.1 Extended leave during Residency

If a Participant takes an extended leave, such as parental leave or medical leave during Residency, the start date of the Return of Service Term would be delayed. The Return of Service Term would commence within six months of Residency completion. The Ministry of Health may require a Contract amendment.

2.1.2 Extended leave during the Return of Service Term

If a Participant takes an extended leave, such as parental leave or medical leave during the Return of Service Term, the end date of the Return of Service Term would be delayed. The Return of Service Term would resume upon completion of the leave. The Ministry of Health may require a Contract amendment.

2.1.3 Educational leave following Residency

If a Participant has an educational leave following Residency, the start date of the Return of Service Term would be delayed. The Return of Service Term would commence within six months of completing the training. The Ministry of Health may require a Contract amendment.

2.1.4 Educational leave during the Return of Service Term

If a Participant has an educational leave during the Return of Service Term, the end date of the Return of Service Term would be delayed. The Return of Service Term would resume upon completion of the training. The Ministry of Health may require a Contract amendment.

Intent

To outline the impact of a delayed Participant, an off-cycle Participant, or a Participant with a deferred Residency start.

Background

A delayed Participant is a Participant who is delayed in the completion of their Residency beyond the standard Residency length. An off-cycle Participant is a Participant who is originally scheduled by UBC to start Residency in a month other than July or finish Residency in a month other than June.

2.2.1 Deadlines for delayed or off-cycle Participants

The Ministry of Health will determine deadlines related to the Return of Service placement process for a delayed or off-cycle Participant in alignment with the Return of Service Contract.

2.2.2 Placement process for delayed or off-cycle Participants

Depending on the timing of the delayed or off-cycle Participant's Residency completion date, the Participant may have the option to defer participation in the placement process.

If the Ministry of Health determines that it is not feasible to wait until the next scheduled Return of Service placement process, the Participant will work to secure a Return of Service Placement as directed.

2.2.3 Deferred Residency start

If a Participant is approved by UBC to defer the start of their Residency to a later year, the Participant will still sign their Return of Service Contract by the date provided by the Ministry of Health.

Intent

To outline the required prior notice or approvals for a Participant to apply for advanced or additional training prior to completing their Return of Service Term and the review of training requests.

3.1.1 Advanced or additional training pathways

For the purposes of the Competitive Stream Return of Service Contract and policy, advanced or additional training includes:

(a) subspecialty, and

(b) fellowship.

Participants may also consider other training pathways.

3.1.2 Required prior notice and approvals

As there is an impact on the Return of Service Contract, prior notice to or approval from the Ministry of Health Physician Return of Service Programs is required for a Participant to apply to advanced or additional training or other training pathways. The Participant may also need to send prior notice to their Return of Service Health Authority. The required prior notice and approvals are detailed as follows:

(a) Participants applying to subspecialty or fellowship programs **within B.C.**:

i. **Participants not yet matched to a Placement**: Participants who have not yet matched to their Placement must send prior notice to the Ministry of Health Physician Return of Service Programs to apply to a subspecialty or fellowship that is within B.C.

ii. **Participants matched to a Placement or completing Return of Service**: Participants who have matched to their Placement or are currently completing their Return of Service must send prior notice to the Ministry of Health Physician Return of Service Programs and their Health Authority to apply to a subspecialty or fellowship that is within B.C.

(b) Participants applying to subspecialty or fellowship programs **outside B.C.**:

i. **Participants not yet matched to a Placement**: Participants who have not yet matched to their Placement require prior approval from the Ministry of Health Physician Return of Service Programs to apply to a subspecialty or fellowship that is outside B.C.

ii. **Participants matched to a Placement or completing Return of Service**: Participants who have matched to their Placement or are currently completing their Return of Service require prior approval from the Ministry of Health Physician Return of Service Programs to apply to a subspecialty or fellowship that is outside B.C. The Participant must also send prior notice to their Health Authority before applying to a subspecialty or fellowship that is outside B.C.

(c) Participants applying to training **outside their clinical discipline** regardless of location:

i. **Participants not yet matched to a Placement**: Participants who have not yet matched to their Placement require prior approval from the Ministry of Health Physician Return of Service Programs to apply to training that is outside their clinical discipline.

ii. **Participants matched to a Placement or completing Return of Service**: Participants who have matched to their Placement or are currently completing their Return of Service require prior approval from the Ministry of Health Physician Return of Service Programs to apply to a training outside their clinical discipline. The Participant must send prior notice to their Health Authority before applying to a subspecialty or fellowship that is outside their clinical discipline.

(b) Participants applying to **other training pathways**:

i. **Current Participants**: All Participants who have not yet completed their Return of Service Term require prior approval from the Ministry of Health to apply to other training pathways. The Ministry of Health Physician Return of Service Programs would determine whether the Participant would also require prior approval from their Health Authority. If applicable, the Ministry of Health will provide direction to the Participant on securing Health Authority approval.

Summary Table:

Training	Participant Status	Required Prior Action	
		Ministry of Health	Health Authority
Subspecialty or fellowship inside B.C.	Not yet matched to Placement	Send notice	Not yet applicable
	Matched to Placement currently in Return of Service	Send notice	Send notice
Subspecialty or fellowship outside B.C.	Not yet matched to Placement	Request approval	Not yet applicable
	Matched to Placement currently in Return of Service	Request approval	Send notice
Training outside clinical discipline, any location	Current Participants	Request approval	Send notice
Other Training Pathways	Current Participants	Request approval	See 3.1.2 (d)(i)

3.1.3 Return of Service Term

Approved advanced or additional training does not extend the three-year Return of Service Term. As training time does not count towards the Return of Service, the start and end dates of the Return of Service would be deferred per subsections 2.1.3 and 2.1.4 of this policy in the event of an educational leave.

3.1.4 Review of advanced or additional training requests

Where prior approval is required, the Ministry of Health reviews requests for advanced or additional training based on the following considerations:

(a) the Participant's contractual obligations, including but not limited to the provision of Government-Funded Health Services;

(b) the Participant's Placement match status;

(c) the Participant's Return of Service status;

(d) funding availability (if applicable);

(e) training location and duration;

(f) any return of service or commitments that are required of the Participant by the training provider or funder;

(g) current and projected physician resource requirements; and

(h) any other factors the Ministry of Health deems relevant to the specific request as reviewed case-by-case.

3.1.5 Review of other training pathways requests

The Ministry of Health reviews requests for other training pathways based on the same assessment criteria outlined in policy subsection 3.1.4. The Ministry of Health may require an amendment to the Contract terms.

3.1.6 Applying to training

A Participant is responsible for reviewing the eligibility criteria and submitting an application for any advanced or additional training following prior notice or approval as detailed in subsection 3.1.2 of this policy.

3.1.7 Outcome of application to training

Once the application outcome for the approved advanced or additional training is known, the Participant must notify the Ministry of Health Physician Return of Service Programs and their Health Authority.

Intent

To outline the Return of Service location requirements for Competitive Stream Participants and requests for exceptions.

Background

In the Competitive Stream placement process, Participants identify the community and facility in which they wish to complete their Return of Service and propose this Placement to the Ministry of Health. The Ministry of Health Physician Return of Service Programs reviews proposed Placements to confirm alignment with the Contract.

As per the Contract, Participants who match to a 2026 or 2027 Competitive Stream Residency position will complete their Return of Service in the Eligible Practice Region (*i.e.* in B.C., but outside the City of Vancouver, B.C.). This requirement does not apply to Participants who matched to a 2024 or 2025 Competitive Stream Residency position.

4.1.1 Return of Service location

The Ministry of Health's criteria for suitable Placements for Competitive Stream Participants is detailed in the Participant's Contract. Additional practical considerations for Competitive Stream Placements may include:

(a) the Participant may complete their Return of Service in any B.C. Health Authority (*i.e.* Northern Health Authority, Interior Health Authority, Fraser Health Authority, Vancouver Island Health Authority, Vancouver Coastal Health Authority, First Nations Health Authority, Provincial Health Services Authority, or Providence Health Care) where the Participant can secure an Offer Letter for a suitable Placement;

(b) available vacancies in B.C. in the Participant's specialty or subspecialty at the time of the placement process; and

(c) a facility's service model and operational capacity for the Participant's Return of Service.

4.1.2 Communities outside City of Vancouver, B.C.

For further clarity, the Eligible Practice Region for the purposes of Return of Service location for Participants matched to a 2026 or 2027 Competitive Stream Residency position, includes:

(a) communities within the region of Vancouver Coastal Health Authority such as North Vancouver, Powell River, Richmond, Sechelt, West Vancouver, and Whistler (but not the City of Vancouver);

(b) all communities within the regions of Northern Health Authority, Interior Health Authority, Fraser Health Authority, and Vancouver Island Health Authority; and

(c) all *Rural Practice Subsidiary Agreement* (RSA) eligible criteria communities (*i.e.* rural communities).

4.1.3 Exceptions to Placement criteria

The Ministry of Health may approve exceptions to its Placement criteria, including the requirement to complete the Return of Service in the Eligible Practice Region. Exception requests are reviewed on a case-by-case basis and in the context of the Participant's Return of Service obligations, priority service needs, and the practical considerations outlined in subsection 4.1.1 of this policy.

Intent

To outline which services and hours count towards a Participant's Return of Service.

4.2.1 Addendum service deliverables

Services included in a Participant's Approved Addendum count towards their Return of Service and minimum annual hours requirement in accordance with subsections below.

4.2.2 Distribution of hours and minimum annual hours

Return of Service hours are to be distributed equitably over each year of the Return of Service Term to ensure continuity of care for patients. If a Participant fulfills their minimum annual hours requirement before the end of the three-year term, the Return of Service does not complete early.

4.2.3 Specialty medicine services

A specialty medicine Participant will provide Government-Funded Health Services as defined in the Return of Service Contract and described in the Approved Addendum. Linked to the community's needs, the specialty medicine Participant's services may include outreach, training, hospital-based services, or community-based services. If taking advanced or additional training, these services should be reflected in a specialty medicine Participant's Return of Service.

4.2.4 Direct and indirect patient care

Direct patient care and a reasonable level of patient-specific indirect care, such as charting, count towards Return of Service hours.

4.2.5 On-call

Only the patient care component of on-call counts towards Return of Service hours. On-call availability does not count towards Return of Service hours.

4.2.6 Travel

Time spent travelling to and from the work site or service location does not count towards Return of Service hours.

4.2.7 Locum services

Services provided by a locum on behalf of a Participant do not count towards Return of Service hours.

Services that the Participant provides as a locum would count towards the Return of Service if the locum role is specified in the Participant's Approved Addendum.

4.2.8 Vacation, continuing medical education, and leave

Time spent on vacation, continuing medical education, or leave, does not count towards Return of Service hours. Vacation allotment and scheduling are determined through agreement between the Participant and their Placement clinic or facility.

Intent

To outline the Participant's responsibilities and the Ministry of Health's approach if an exceptional circumstance arises for a Participant after the Contract has been signed.

Background

In signing their Contract, the Participant confirmed they intend to fulfill their Return of Service even if it is not in their preferred community or area of B.C. As well, by signing their Contract, the Participant confirmed that they considered all existing or foreseeable circumstances for them and their immediate family and knew of nothing that would preclude the Participant from relocating within British Columbia or otherwise completing the Return of Service in full.

4.3.1 Exceptional circumstance

An exceptional circumstance is:

(a) an unforeseen, severe adversity that creates an undue hardship;
(b) prohibitive to the Participant relocating within B.C. or otherwise completing their Return of Service as per their Contract;
(c) unavoidable with no other reasonable solution available; and
(d) a material change to the Participant's circumstances since signing their Return of Service Contract or since a previous exceptional circumstance request.

Ordinary or reasonably foreseen events or situations are not exceptional circumstances.

4.3.2 Request and review

The Participant may submit a request to the Ministry of Health to amend the terms of the Contract due to an exceptional circumstance. The Ministry of Health may require the Participant to provide documentation to substantiate their exceptional circumstance from a professional third party with relevant knowledge of the Participant's circumstance.

The Ministry of Health reviews all exceptional circumstance requests on a case-by-case basis and in the context of the Participant's Return of Service obligations. The Ministry of Health's review will include whether the Participant's circumstance is an exceptional circumstance, any requested substantiating documentation, and any other factors the Ministry deems relevant to the specific request.

4.3.3 Approved request

If the exceptional circumstance request is approved, the Ministry of Health will determine the amendment to the Contract terms, which may include identifying a region or community for the Return of Service. If approved and applicable, the Ministry of Health will set deadlines for the Participant to secure an Approved Addendum.

Should a new or changed Placement or community be approved, the new Placement or community will be identified in alignment with the Participant's contract (*i.e.* identified by the Participant and proposed to the Ministry of Health).

If the Ministry of Health approves a changed Placement, the Participant is responsible for managing the impact on any other agreements or commitments they have made, such as a practice agreement, Offer Letter, or compensation model.

4.3.4 Denied request

If the exceptional circumstance request is denied, the Participant will fulfill their Return of Service per their Contract (*i.e.* within the Eligible Practice Region, if applicable). If applicable, the Ministry of Health will set deadlines for the Participant to secure an Approved Addendum.

4.3.5 Death or grave illness

In the event the Participant dies or becomes gravely ill and is no longer able to practise medicine before completing Residency or their Return of Service, the Ministry of Health may forgive some or all of the Repayment Amount owed under the Contract.