

Creating a roadmap for internationally trained medical doctors (ITMDs) to transition into non-licensed health sector employment: An evidence-based study identifying alternative career pathways

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Roadmap for ITMDs Research Report

The Roadmap Research Study explored effectiveness of the pilot phase of the ITMD Bridging Program, and also created a road-map for ITMDs to transition into careers in the non-licensed health sector by assessing transferrable skills and identifying skill gaps and barriers. Evaluation of the pilot phase of the bridging program revealed that students acquired significant skills in each of the courses offered. As well, students reported a high degree of satisfaction with in-course and practicum elements. In each course, students gained between 32 and 42 points when comparing entry and exit surveys. Student ratings of in-course elements were also very high, with almost 100% of students rating each aspect of in-course and practicum elements as either “excellent” or “good”. These findings highlight the strengths of the curriculum and program design.

The research project was also crucial to systematically gather information on the program’s strengths and weaknesses. This aspect of the research allowed us to identify opportunities to strengthen the program, as well as to acknowledge successful aspects of the program. For instance, it was identified that lengthening and adding to content of courses may better prepare students for employment. Engaging with employers directly allowed for identification of specific skills that they are looking for, and thus curriculum can be designed to ensure it covers the key skills identified by employers.

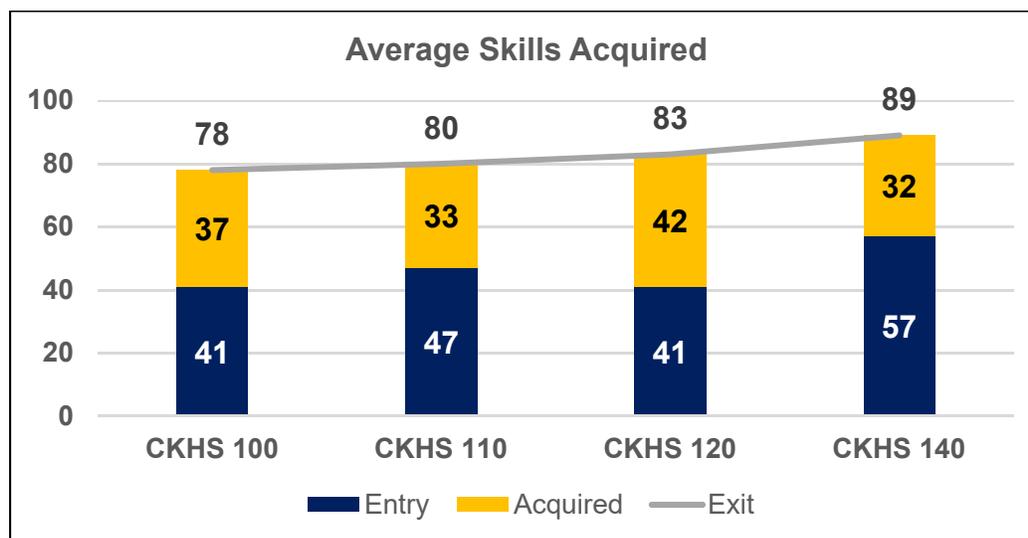


Figure 1: ITMD program participants’ average skills (pre-post) changes

The research project also revealed key findings related to challenges obtaining employment, and strategies to overcome these challenges. Some of the challenges to employment were consistent with what many immigrants experience such as financial difficulty, discrimination, and difficulty learning the English language. However, many other challenges described were specific to Internationally Trained Medical Doctors seeking employment. For instance, lack of understanding about jobs that ITMDs could pursue as an alternative to medical licensing was described as a prominent challenge. As well, difficulty entering the job market due to lack of Canadian experience and connections were noted. However, the Bridging Program was recognized as a tool to help ITMDs overcome many challenges that they face when they seek employment. For instance, the bridging program gives its students an opportunity to gain Canadian experience, while making connections through the networking opportunities offered, and gaining systems navigation skills. Although the Bridging Program is crucial to help students overcome many of the described challenges, there are far more ITMDs seeking out the program than there are seats available. Thus, expanding and scaling up the Bridging Program would allow for capacity building and training opportunities for more ITMDs.

While expanding and scaling up of the Bridging Program would allow more ITMDs to have access to training that helps transition into employment, the Bridging Program alone cannot provide training to all ITMDs. Thus, additional approaches are needed to support ITMDs. Findings from the research suggest numerous other strategies at both individual and systems-levels. At the individual, job search facilitators would help bridge the current information gap by linking ITMDs with relevant jobs in the non-licensed health sector. As well, networking opportunities, job preparation services, and opportunities to gain experience such as through practicums would help address some of the challenges to employment previously described. Although these individual-level opportunities are important, it is also critical to incorporate systems-level changes to address the challenges to employment. For instance, increasing the connectivity of information would help ITMDs navigate existing resources as well as avoid duplication of services. As well, clear messaging of immigration policies as well as prospects of employment within Canada would help potential immigrants, including ITMDs, have realistic expectations upon arrival in Canada.

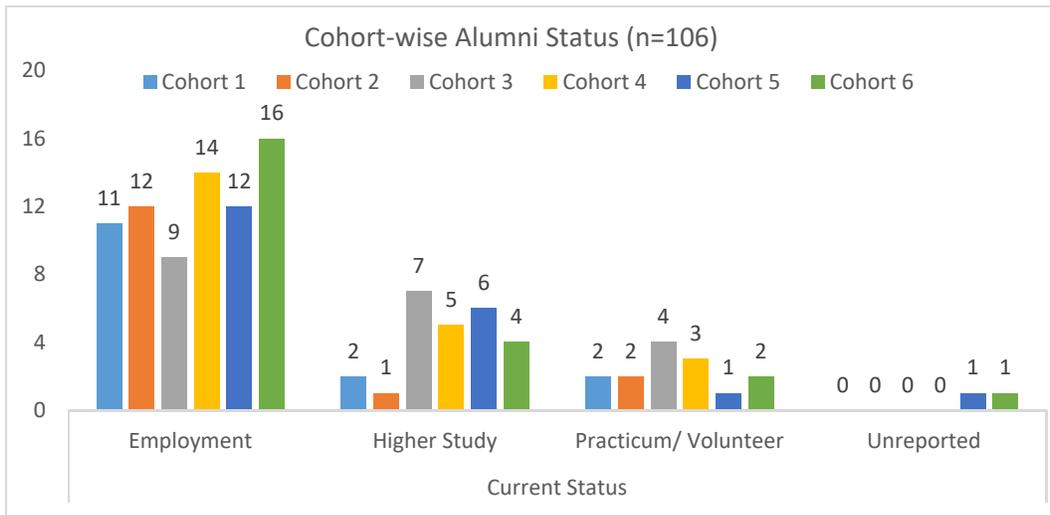


Figure 2: ITMDs program Cohort-wise participants' status

The study also highlighted strengths that ITMDs possess, while also identifying opportunities for skill development. For instance, stakeholders noted that ITMDs possess significant clinical experience, as well as rich understanding of international contexts. However, given that ITMDs have been trained in the medical field, there can be some skill gaps when transitioning into non-licensed employment in areas such as research methods, report writing, and program planning. Thus, ITMDs seeking employment in the non-licensed health sector can often benefit from additional training such as the coursework offered through the Bridging Program.

Stakeholders and ITMDs also described some key lessons learned and factors that can increase chances of obtaining employment. For instance, creating strong job applications that are tailored to job postings opposed to “generic” applications was one key example. As well, given that many non-licensed health sector positions will require skills that ITMDs may not have developed in their medical degrees, pursuing opportunities to improve skills in these areas can increase employability. It was also noted that reflecting on and defining one’s own career goals can be an important step. Positions within the non-licensed health sector can vary considerably, and thus identifying a career goal can help ITMDs plan strategies to achieve these goals.

Lessons Learned and Best Practices

One of the key lessons learned during this research project is the strength of a comprehensive program approach. Incorporating coursework, practicum elements, and job coaching allowed students to gain a variety of skills that often facilitated their transition into employment. For instance, coursework was fundamental to introduce or enhance skills related to the non-licensed health sector, which added to students’ existing medical knowledge. However, the practicum

placements allowed students to gain practical, applied experience to complement their theoretical understanding that was acquired during the coursework. Lastly, job preparation training helps students to prepare to transition into the workforce.

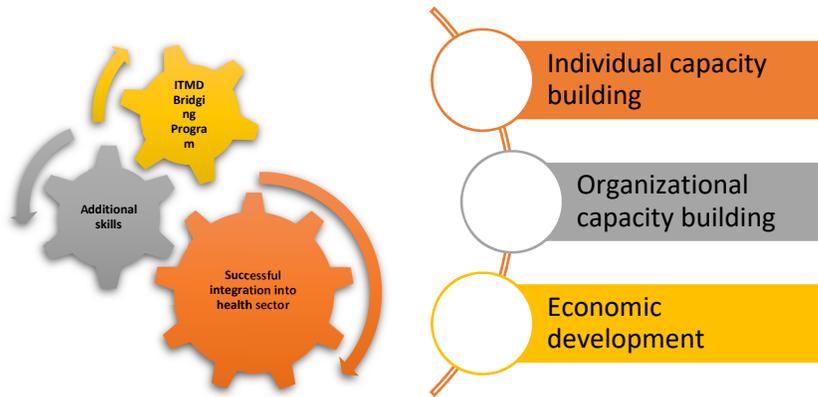


Figure 3: Long term impact model of ITMDs training program

Another key lesson learned is the importance of building on existing assets and strengths. At Ryerson University, the Gateway for International Professionals has a long history of providing successful bridging programs. The Chang School for Continuing Education’s bridging programs are collaborative, rigorously designed, and prepare students for employment by targeting and addressing skills gaps. Its current programs being offered include Dietetics and Nutrition, Midwifery and Physiotherapy. However, there was no bridging program that focused on non-licensed health sector employment such as research assistant positions and program manager positions. Thus, the ITMD Bridging Program supplements and complements existing programs while offering a program that fills an existing gap.

Partnership is also an integral component to the success of bridging programs as well as to successfully transition students into employment. The ITMD Bridging Program has numerous partners which contributed to many aspects of the program including curriculum development as well as providing practicum placements to students. Forming diverse partnerships including with stakeholders in health sector organizations as well as in academia is also integral to the success of bridging programs.

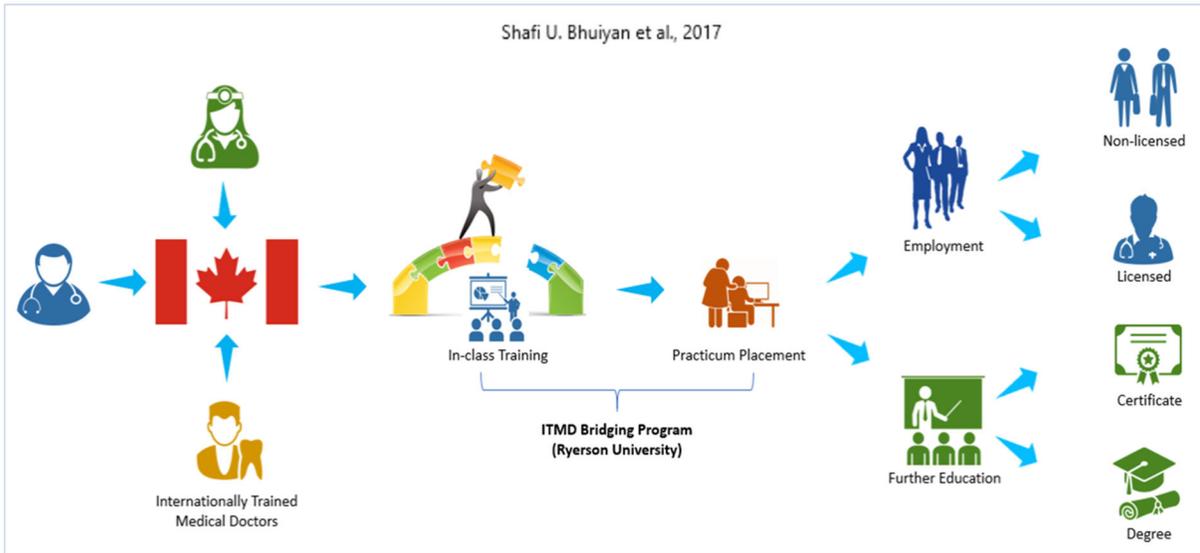


Figure 4: ITMDs alternative career pathways at a glance

Lastly, transitioning Internationally Trained Medical Doctors into non-licensed employment requires multi-level, multi-sectoral collaboration. At the individual level, there are opportunities for ITMDs to build capacity by upgrading skills through courses. However, individual-level strategies must be complemented with organization/institution and systems-level strategies. Given the high number of ITMDs immigrating to Canada, employers need to recognize international credentials and experience. Programs that offer “fast-tracked” completion of degrees for those who have already completed certain courses would allow ITMDs to have their credentials recognized, while also gaining new skills. As well, scale-up of existing programs like the ITMD Bridging Program at Ryerson University is an important institution-level strategy to meet the increasing demand amongst ITMDs. Finally, at a systems level, providing ITMDs who are considering settling in Canada as well as those who have already immigrated with resources and information about employment prospects would facilitate the transition of ITMDs into non-licensed employment.

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