

## Alternative Healthcare Careers - Overview and Tips

### Why consider an alternative career?

As a physician, your priority is likely to look for employment within your field of practice. There are a number of pathways to licensure and you can explore which one(s) will work best for you. However, while you are fulfilling the requirement for licensure you can explore alternative careers.

Working in a medical related field can improve your chances to work as a physician in Canada because it allows you to experience first hand the Canadian context of healthcare. This will also help you in your exam preparation and provide you with the right network of people who might be able to support you in your journey in the medical or alternative career.

Alternative careers should be relevant to your experience and interest. The following criteria can help you identify the alternative career that best suits your situation:

- It is in the field of Medicine or healthcare.
- It allows you to demonstrate some of your clinical skills in your field of practice.
- It allows you to better understand the Canadian system of your field of experience. This can include medical terminology, documentation, administrative procedures, concepts of healthcare, interacting with patients and families ... etc.

### Your options

Depending on your situation, you can either work immediately or go back to study either at a University or College.

### Education

At the university you can either take a graduate level degree by obtaining a Masters or a PhD in a health related field such as epidemiology, microbiology, health administration, health policy... etc or

change your health career to study nursing, social work, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, education or other programs.

At the College you may obtain a diploma or certificate in a health related field such as continuing care, medical laboratory technology, occupational therapy, physiotherapy assistant, practical nursing, paramedics .... etc. College programs maybe shorter and are less costly than university programs.

### Employment

If you choose to work immediately in a health related occupation, you need to assess your readiness to participate in the workforce.

Factors that influence your success in obtaining a job in a health related field:

- Language proficiency in English
- Network of contacts who might help you find a position and/or provide you with a good reference, and
- Nonclinical skills that relate to a particular position including research skills, knowledge of marketing, counseling ability, teaching skills ....etc.

### Your strengths

Throughout your career as a physician you obtained many skills that are valuable. The combination of your skills and knowledge of medicine can be valuable to job positions in health care. As an example your knowledge of medication and drugs can help secure a job as a pharmacy technician or a pharmaceutical representative. Your interview skills and case management experience can help you work as a client support worker in women shelter and addictions centers.

Highlighting these skills is important. When you prepare resumes and cover letter when applying for jobs. Qualities that you have successfully possessed throughout the years need to be highlighted too. The list might include: compassionate, ethical,

professional, sensitivity, attention to detail, efficient, ability to handle pressure, ability to make strategic decisions ... etc.

Examples of skills that are highlighted in job description:

- Interpersonal (ability to interact with people of all ages and work in multi-disciplinary teams)
- Counseling (Listening interviewing),
- Communication (advice and support to patients and families, ability to discuss sensitive issues or technical information)
- Administration, computer skills (operating office, referrals, consultations)
- Research, laboratory (conducted medical or other research, conducted microscopic analysis)
- Education, presentation (case presentations to colleagues, patients and community education, lectures and participation in conferences)
- Writing, analytical, assessment, management, organizational... etc.

### Types of positions available

Positions can be offered by the government (federal, provincial & municipalities) or non governmental organizations. Following are some examples of positions that you might encounter when looking for jobs:

Administrative positions (with Canadian cancer society, Canadian Institute of Health Research, Canadian Centre of Health Research and Safety... etc.)	Health Promotion Worker
Clinical Associate	Interpreter
College/University Professor	Medical Reviewer (review drugs before they go to market)
Community Service Worker	Nutrition Counselor
ECG Technician	Personal Support Worker, Home Care Aide
EEG Technician	Pharmaceutical Representative
Epidemiologist Assistant	Pharmacy Assistant
Family Visitor (check on families after they bring their new baby home)	Medical Sale Representative
First Aid Instructor	Phlebotomist
Health Journalist	Program Consultant
Health Services Administrator	Program Evaluation Analyst
Health Policy Analyst	Project Officer/Assistant
	Research Assistant
	Research Scientist
	Respiratory Therapist
	Ultrasound Technician
	Sleep Clinic Technician

**Resumes**

When you apply for a job need to submit a resume in contrast with the Curriculum Vitae (CV) format that you submit when applying for residency. Resumes are shorter and targeted to the job you are looking for in contrast with CVs. In your resume, you need to shift the details presented away from medical career history to skills you have gained in your years as a physician that may be transferred to alternative career options.

When writing a resume, first identify your objectives and career goals then identify the skills and knowledge that are needed for the job you are applying for. After determining your objective, structure the resume component to fit the career objectives.

Your main goal when preparing the resume is to obtain an interview. Make a list of your strongest skills that make you a good candidate for the position. For each of your skills, think of several accomplishments from your work history that illustrate each skill. Also make a list of your training and education that is related to the job you want. Add components that highlight your experience related to your job target in sections such as professional associations, volunteer work, etc.

Your resume should be clear and concise. Use bullet points with short sentences rather than long paragraphs. Use action words such as managed, prepared, developed, monitored, presented... etc. At last, have at least two people proofread your resume.

**Cover letter**

The cover letter shows the employer why they should consider you for the job. The cover letter is a first impression you make on the employer and shows how well you communicate in writing. Ideally the cover letter would give the reader a compelling reason why they want to hire you.

In your cover letter you need to put your

full name, address, phone number and e-mail address at the top of the page. The cover letter is usually divided in three paragraphs: the first paragraph usually informs related to where you learned about the job opening and why you are interested in that job. The second paragraph explains what can you offer to the employer and what potential benefits the employer will have from hiring you.

Conclude the cover letter by informing the employer that you will follow up to ensure that the resume and cover letter have been received. Always assume that the responsive is positive.

**Interviews**

Job interviews are conducted to answer the following questions:

- Are you able to do the job?
- Are you willing to put in the efforts to make the job a success?
- Are you manageable?

The interview is also an opportunity for you to look at the organization and assess whether it is a good fit for you. There are two questions you may encounter during an interview:

- Are you overqualified for the position?
- Do you have Canadian experience?

When you are overqualified for a position you might feel bored or unsatisfied. Furthermore, being overqualified for a job is considered a threat to supervisors in the hiring organization and might give the perception that you will be in the organization for only a short period of time. Accepting overqualified candidates in this case is considered by the hiring organization a cost rather than an asset.

During the interview you need to assure the employer of your loyalty to the organization by highlighting your skills and experience as an asset for the organization as they will allow you to hit the ground running for a better return on investment if they hire you.

Following are some venues and tools that can be helpful for you when looking for work:

- Networking (large percentage of jobs are filled through a word-of-mouth. Try to meet with people and volunteer at organizations that you like to work with)
- Career website such as careerbeacon
- Health care institution in your area (Capital Health, IWK Health Centre, Nursing Homes...etc)
- Newspapers (check the classified for any announced position)
- Volunteer work (Can help you obtain Canadian experience but at the same time can provide you with the right network to obtain a job)
- Medical conventions and conferences (either attend as a guest or volunteer)
- Job fairs (meet with employers and introduce yourself)
- Employment agencies (offered through non-profit organizations as a free service to help you with your resume, cover letter and job search).
- Recruitment firms (represent a small percentage of job openings)

Communicating your sincere interest in working for the organization by emphasizing on your unique attitudes, abilities and interests that led you to apply for this job. Highlight your enthusiasm for the job and for the opportunity to learn.

Having a Canadian experience is one of the most important incentives of employers to hire you. Having a Canadian experience is translated in your awareness of the Canadian workplace culture and practices. You can give examples of working in a Canadian workplace or volunteering in a health related facilities such as hospitals, nursing homes and addiction services.

**Useful links**

- Nova Scotia Government  
<http://www.gov.ns.ca/psc/default.asp?mn=1.164.198.200>
- CareerBeacon  
[http://www.careerbeacon.com/IWK employment](http://www.careerbeacon.com/IWK%20employment)
- <http://www.iwk.nshealth.ca/index.cfm?objectId=F032DCCD4-CAB0-10AB-413923B50D74D97D>
- Nova Scotia Community College  
College of Paramedics in Nova Scotia  
<http://www.cpns.ca/paramedicprograms/index.html>
- Dalhousie Graduate Programs  
<http://dalgrad.dal.ca/programs/>