

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS - 2019

Specialty/Field Questions:

1. a) What are some strengths about your specialty? What draws and keeps people in your specialty?

Radiation Oncology is a stimulating specialty with a significant clinical component caring for challenging patients dealing with a serious illness. At the same time there is a definite technical component based on the delivery of ionizing radiation in the treatment of cancer. As well there is an excellent opportunity for both research and teaching.

- b) What are some common complaints your specialty?

The most challenging aspect of our specialty is letting other practitioners know about us and to understand what we do as we tend to practice in cancer centres away from most other practitioners.

2. Why did you choose your specialty?

My choice of radiation oncology as a career was stimulated by my strong interest in cancer as a disease as well as the challenge of caring for patients dealing with a serious illness. At the same time, there is a basis in hard science in the delivery of radiation treatment, which I found appealing. The lifestyle of a radiation oncologist is such that there is a minimum of out of hour's call and most work is dealt with during the regular working week

3. What types of clinical cases do you commonly see?

Most radiation oncologists sub specialize in two or three tumour sites e.g. breast, lung, gynecology etc. We see patients newly diagnosed with different cancers usually in a multidisciplinary clinic. If radiation treatment is indicated we plan their therapy and manage their care through the course of treatment and usually provide follow up care as well.

4. Briefly describe a typical day.

Over a week most radiation oncologists will have one or two new patient clinics as well as a similar number of follow up clinics. One or two half days are devoted to the planning of radiation treatment and the ongoing care of patients on treatment. Time is set aside for teaching and/or research.

5. a) What are the varieties of lifestyles within your field?

As radiation oncologists must practice at a cancer centre in Canada most of these are associated with a University. Therefore to a large extent most radiation oncologists have an academic posting. Thus there is usually a balance between clinical practice, research and education, which varies from person to person depending on their job description in their department.

- b) Specifically, how able is your specialty to accommodate family life?

Radiation Oncology is primarily a specialty which is practiced weekdays in normal working hours. On call commitments are not overly onerous and are consistent with a reasonable family life.

6. Range of incomes?

At the moment starting salaries for radiation oncologists at most cancer centres in Canada vary between \$250,000 and \$500,000. Senior oncologists within Canada earn between \$400,000 (BC) - \$750,000 (Ontario).

7. How do you see your discipline changing over the next decade?

With an aging population it is anticipated that cancer incidence will increase and therefore the need for Radiation Oncologists will continue to increase. It is anticipated that radiation treatments may become more complex and technology will probably alter the way in which radiation treatments are done over the next decade.

Residency Program Questions:

8. a) What are you looking for specifically in an impressive candidate?

Candidates would require empathy, maturity, and communication skills to be able to deal with oncology patients. A strong academic record and a demonstrated interest in oncology is preferred. Research and/or teaching experience is an attribute.

- b) What can a potential candidate do now in order to be an appealing applicant to your program?

A potential candidate should be a well-rounded physician with excellent interpersonal and communications skills to be able to deal with the demands of cancer patients. An aptitude for math and physics is helpful, but more importantly we are looking for physicians who have explored the components of radiation oncology which are not apparent to most medical students in their limited exposure to our specialty.

9. How is your residency program organized? (i.e. year by year breakdown and schedule of rotations)

The Radiation Oncology Residency Training Program is accredited by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. The program is five years and has recently introduced competency based medical education. There are five stages of training. In the first year residents will do one month of Radiation Oncology as their Transition to Discipline Stage, followed the Foundations of Discipline Stage. Currently there are 10 four-week rotations, as well as a four week vacation block. These rotations are as follows: Internal Medicine (2 blocks), General Surgery, ENT, Emergency Medicine, Palliative Care, Medical Oncology (2 blocks), Diagnostic Radiology, and Respiratory (ATOP). These rotations would be off site rotations.

The resident returns to Radiation Oncology/Cross Cancer Institute for the remainder of their training. The next 36-44 months are preceptor based two/three-month blocks in which the resident is exposed to all tumor sites. The Core of Discipline Stage of training will focus on the resident's clinical skills in radiation oncology.

This latter period can be spent in a research project or in further clinical experience. The radiation oncology training rotations are based at the Cross Cancer Institute. Didactic teaching and formal courses in radiation biology and medical physics are included in the Core Stage.

The final Transition to Practice stage (three to nine months) focuses on refining the skills of a Radiation Oncologist.

10. What is your residency program's orientation and focus?

Our residency program is meant to train both good clinicians as well as academic Radiation Oncologists.

11. What is the availability of experiences in subspecialty areas during training?

N/A

12. Are there sufficient elective opportunities during training to explore your special interests?

Yes

13. What is the on-call schedule during each year of residency?

The on-call schedule during the first year depends on the specific rotation on which the resident is on, but varies between no on-call up to one night in four. During the remaining three and a half years, on-call is from home and is usually done one week at a time every fourth or fifth week. On-call residents cover issues related to outpatient oncology cases and cases requiring urgent radiotherapy

14. What distinguishes the U of A program from other programs?

One of the largest programs in Canada which was established 30 years ago. Consistent success with Royal College exams

15. a) Who can we contact for more information or to set up electives?

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b) Specifically, is there a list of residents whom we can call or email?

Michael Wang – 780-432-8754 (wang3@ualberta.ca)
Paul Sanghera – 780-432-8754 (karanpau@ualberta.ca)

16. How competitive is it to get in, and then to succeed in your field?

There are generally unmatched radiation oncology spots after the first iteration of the CaRMS match.

17. a) Is there active and/or required research in your residency program?

A six month elective period occurs in the third or fourth year and a majority of residents choose to do research during that time.

b) What role does research play in your career?

Basic research methodology is taught and residents are exposed to the research occurring at the Cross Cancer Institute. Residents are expected to have at least one research project during their residency over and above the six-month elective time during which research itself may be chosen.

18. What local, national or international conferences would be of benefit to candidates interested in your residency program?

CARO – Canadian Association of Radiation Oncologists, annual meeting is held each fall.

For a complete description of the Radiation Oncology Program, please visit the CaRMS web page (www.carms.ca) or University of Alberta, Department of Oncology website (www.oncology.med.ualberta.ca)

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