

Title: CANMeds – a suitable framework for post-graduate pathology training in South Africa

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Context and Setting: In South Africa a parallel system of post-graduate specialist certification exists. Universities are tasked with training all enrolled candidates while certification examinations are conducted by both universities and a national College of Pathologists (COP) of South Africa. Successful completion of either examinations permits trainees to register as pathologists with the Health Professions Council South Africa.

Why the idea was necessary: Given the parallel certification systems, real and perceived inconsistencies exist in the training programmes offered by the different universities. In particular, programme outcomes and educational alignment between programme content and assessment practices have been a cause for ongoing concern. Furthermore, alignment between university programmes and the COP of South Africa assessment process has never been standardised. The need to establish a national framework of programme outcomes, suitable for teaching and assessment, is apparent.

What was done: The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada's competency framework (CANMeds), where the general competencies of specialists are clustered into seven major roles, was selected as the basis for establishing an initial framework on which to base a national training programme for South Africa. This model was used to conduct a survey of all pathologists and pathologists-in-training in the country. The purpose of the survey was to establish a consensus opinion of the most important components of the CANMeds model considered important and/or essential in local post-graduate training programmes. A 6-point Likert scale (essential, very important, somewhat important, less important, unimportant, unnecessary) was used to score survey responses.

Evaluation of results: A response rate of 48% of 400 electronically distributed surveys was achieved. All seven major roles identified by CANMeds were regarded as somewhat important, very important or essential, by the majority of respondents: medical expert – 99%, communicator – 88%, collaborator – 99%, manager – 96%, health advocate – 93%, scholar – 93%, professional – 98%. The results were presented at the annual national Federation of South African Societies of Pathology conference and the development of a national framework based on the CANMeds model was unanimously accepted by the Federation and the COP of South Africa Council.

This critical first step paves the way for developing a standardised uniformly accepted model of training and assessment of pathologists. Furthermore, it demonstrates the potential use of the CANMeds model for standardising postgraduate training programmes in other specialty disciplines in the country.

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