

The National IMG Database: An Emerging Picture of International Medical Graduates in Canada

Tamara Brown, Project Manager; Steve Slade, VP Research and Analysis
The Canadian Post-M.D. Education Registry; The Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada

Context

International Medical Graduates (IMGs) play a longstanding role in providing care to Canadians, and comprise 23.3% of the Canadian physician workforce¹. Faced with physician supply challenges, IMGs are a critical component of Canada's Health Human Resource (HHR) Strategy. Furthermore, Canada is witnessing a growing number of IMGs, and with this has come a continued effort to assess, train and recognize foreign credentials leading to licensed practice.

In 2002, the Canadian Task Force on the Licensure of IMGs made six recommendations to address IMG barriers to licensure and practice. One of these recommendations stipulated the need to "develop capacity to track and recruit IMGs" and another recommended the development of a national research agenda². Thus, the National IMG Database was created by the Canadian Post-M.D. Education Registry (CAPER) with support from the Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada (AFMC) and the Foreign Credentials Recognition Division of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC).

Implications and Policy Relevance

Increased immigration of physicians to Canada has stimulated recent efforts to respond to the needs of these IMGs as well as to the needs of Canada's patient population. For example, the Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications was developed to improve qualification assessment and recognition practices, in particular for regulated occupations such as physicians³. In addition, Provinces such as Manitoba and Ontario have established fairness commissioners to ensure that all qualified regulated professionals are able to obtain a license to practice in Canada⁴. Lastly, efforts made by the Medical Council of Canada in the creation of a National Assessment Collaboration (NAC) and the recent legislation granting physicians license portability across jurisdictions through the Agreement on Internal Trade (AIT) both signify efforts to address the equitable and fair treatment of IMGs in Canada.

The ability to determine the measurable impact of these efforts is critical, and is one of the primary objectives of the National IMG Database. A delicate balance exists between the recognition of foreign credentials, and the recertification of

these credentials once in Canada. As shown below (chart 6), we are able to measure the number of IMGs in a cohort having completed each milestone in Canada along the path to licensure. Alternatively, the image that follows (chart 7) shows a large number of IMGs licensed here during a specific timeframe who may or may not have accomplished the same milestone events in Canada. This particular image suggests that in many cases, foreign credentials are being recognized. Given the need to evaluate the impact of these recent efforts to improve the IMG regulatory environment, the National IMG Database is well positioned to provide valuable metrics to support this endeavor.

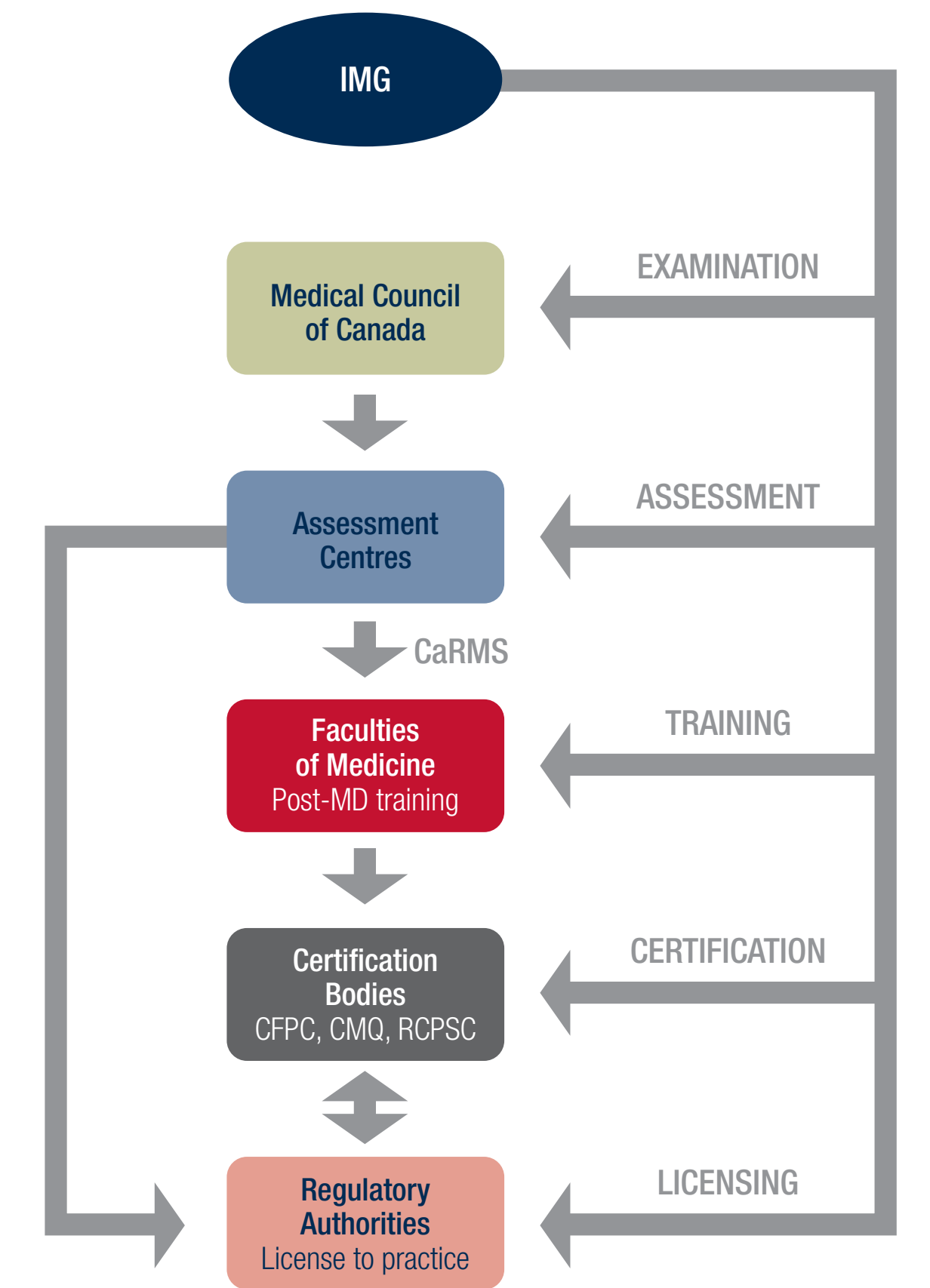
Canada's medical training, assessment, certification and licensing system has long aspired to serve and protect patients. The policy and regulatory initiatives noted above aim to respond to the needs of IMGs while simultaneously meeting the healthcare needs of Canadians. Data from the National IMG Database points to areas where we are – or are not – making progress in meeting our goals. For example, we have seen a significant increase in the number of first-year post-M.D. trainees in Canada – particularly for IMGs, whose numbers have risen 453% over the past ten years. Conversely, there are still a large number of IMGs who are considering going abroad (in this case, to the United States) for their postgraduate training, perhaps never to return. The National IMG Database will continue to be an important tool in providing analytics to evaluate our system.

Data Sources and Study Design

The National IMG Database receives data from 38 organizations annually. Each data file contains individual IMG records. Records are linked across data files and stored in a secure database using a system of anonymous unique identifiers.

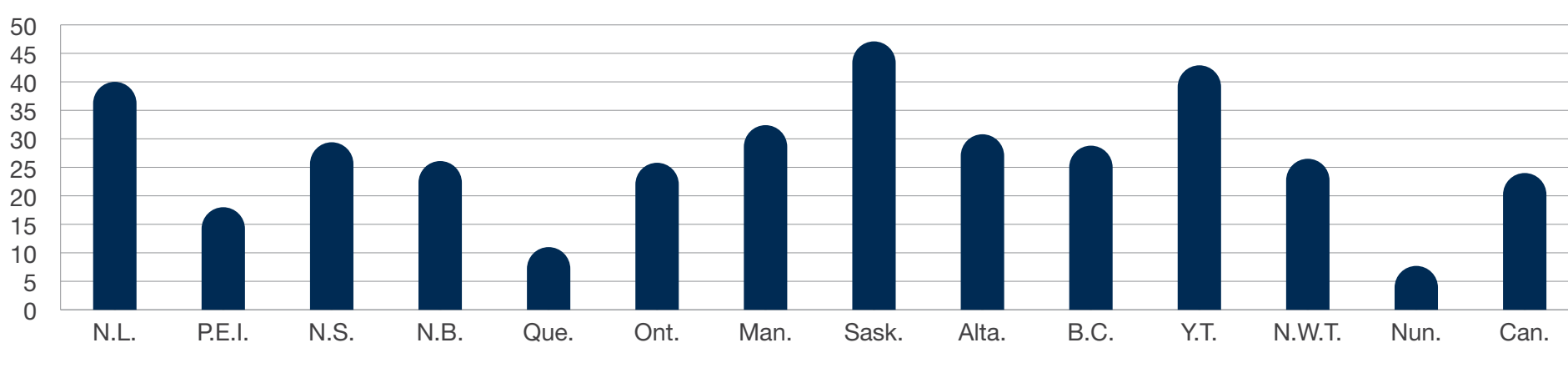
As of 2011, the National IMG Database covers the time period 2005-2010. By the fall of 2012, it will be possible to conduct studies for the 7-year time period 2005-2011. A wide range of topics and can be addressed using the data, including:

- IMG demographic trends and foreign qualifications
- Common pathways to licensure
- Time required to achieve educational and regulatory milestones
- Migration across jurisdictions and urban-rural settings
- Cohort analysis and success indicators
- Cross-jurisdiction variations



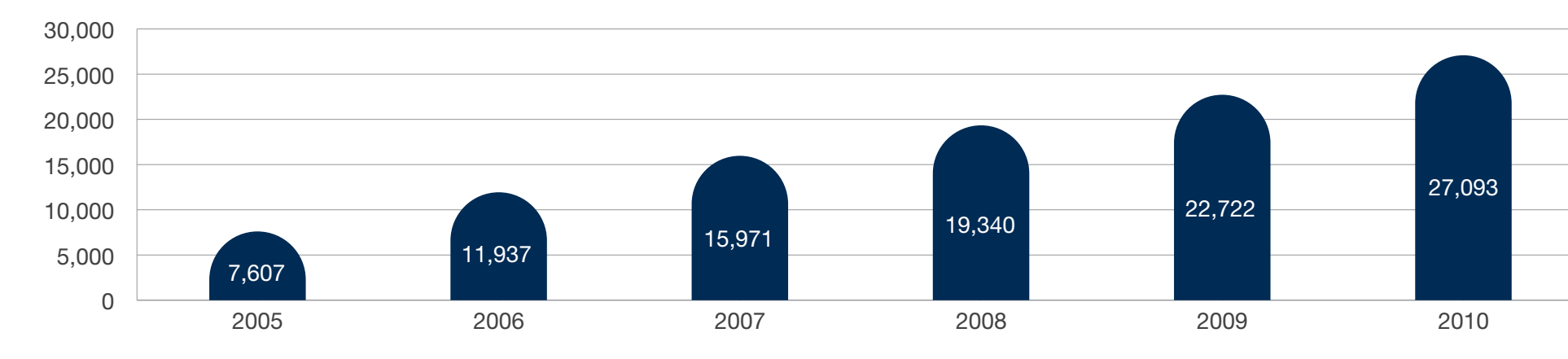
Key Findings

Chart 1: Percentage of Total Workforce That Are International Medical Graduates, by Jurisdiction in Canada, 2010



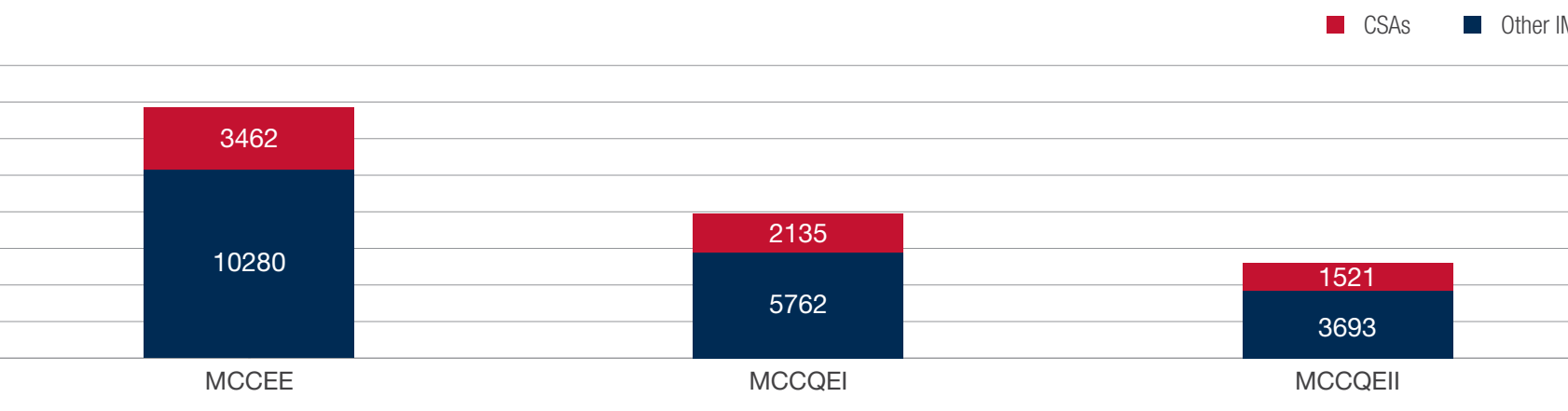
There is considerable variation amongst Provinces and Territories in terms of the percentage of IMGs in their physician workforce. In 2010, Saskatchewan had the highest percentage of IMGs (47.1%) whereas Nunavut had the lowest (7.7%).

Chart 2: Cumulative Number of Distinct IMGs in the National IMG Database



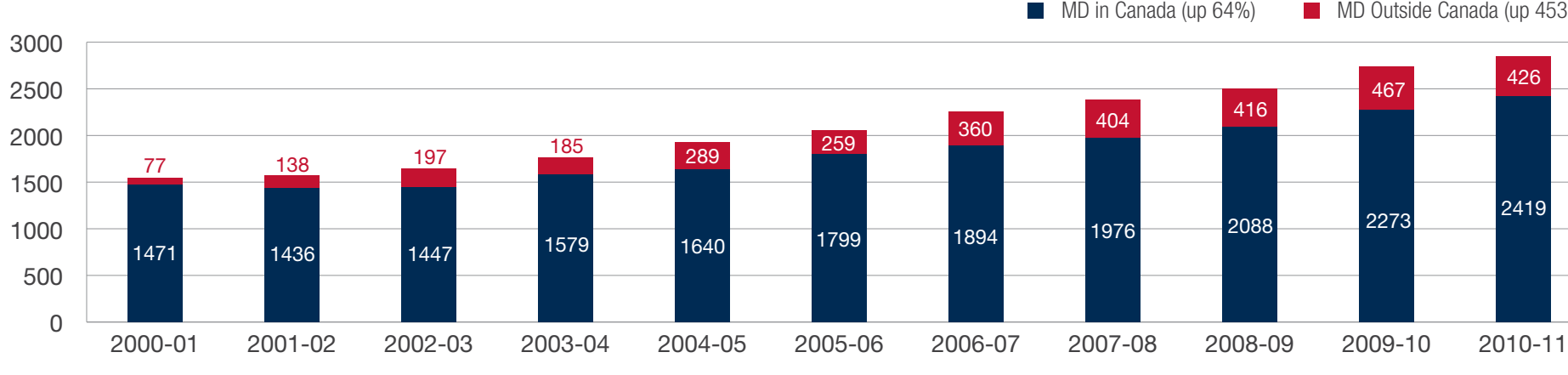
The number of distinct IMGs in the National IMG Database has grown substantially since its inception. Since 2005, the number of IMGs in the database has grown from 7,607 to just over 27,000 distinct individuals. Not all these IMGs will go on to become licensed physicians in Canada – many are non-Citizens, writing the MCC Evaluating Exam overseas and/or training in Canada under Visa status.

Chart 3: Number of IMGs Passing MCC Examinations, 2005-2010



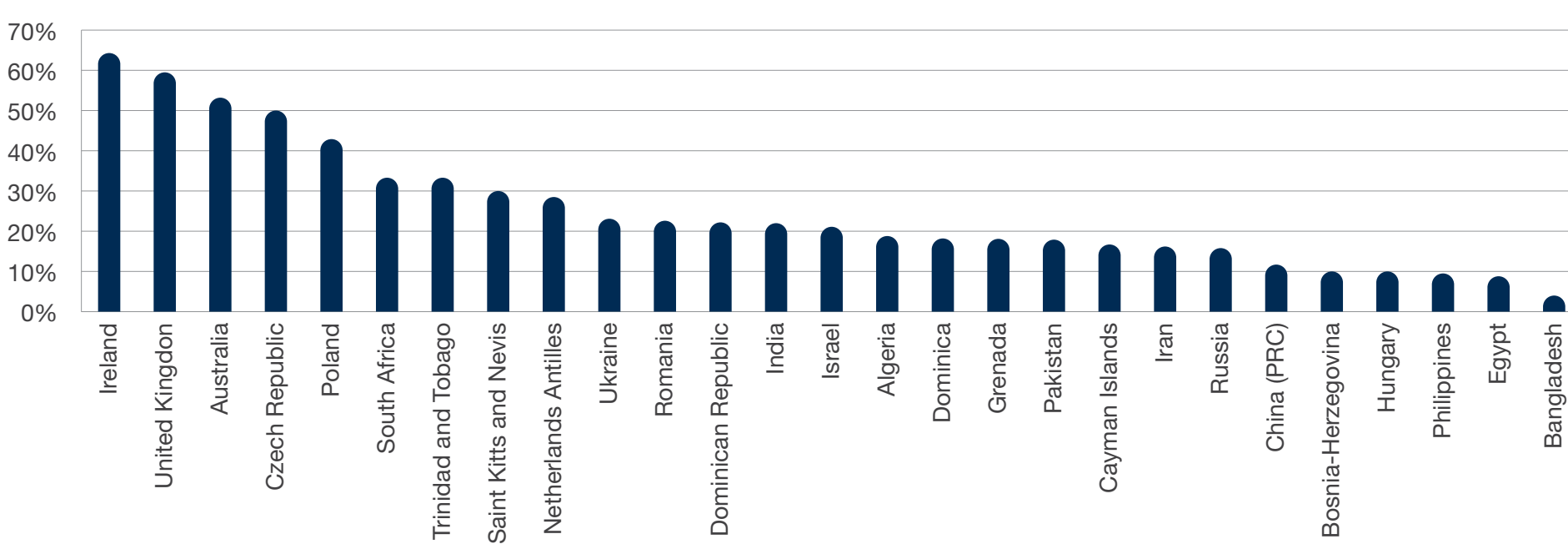
A large number of IMGs passed the MCC EE between 2005-2010, 25% of whom are Canadians Studying Abroad (CSAs). Less IMGs have passed the MCCQE1 and MCCQEII during the same time period, though the CSA to Other IMG ratios remain similar.

Chart 4: Increased Number of First Year Post-MD Trainees



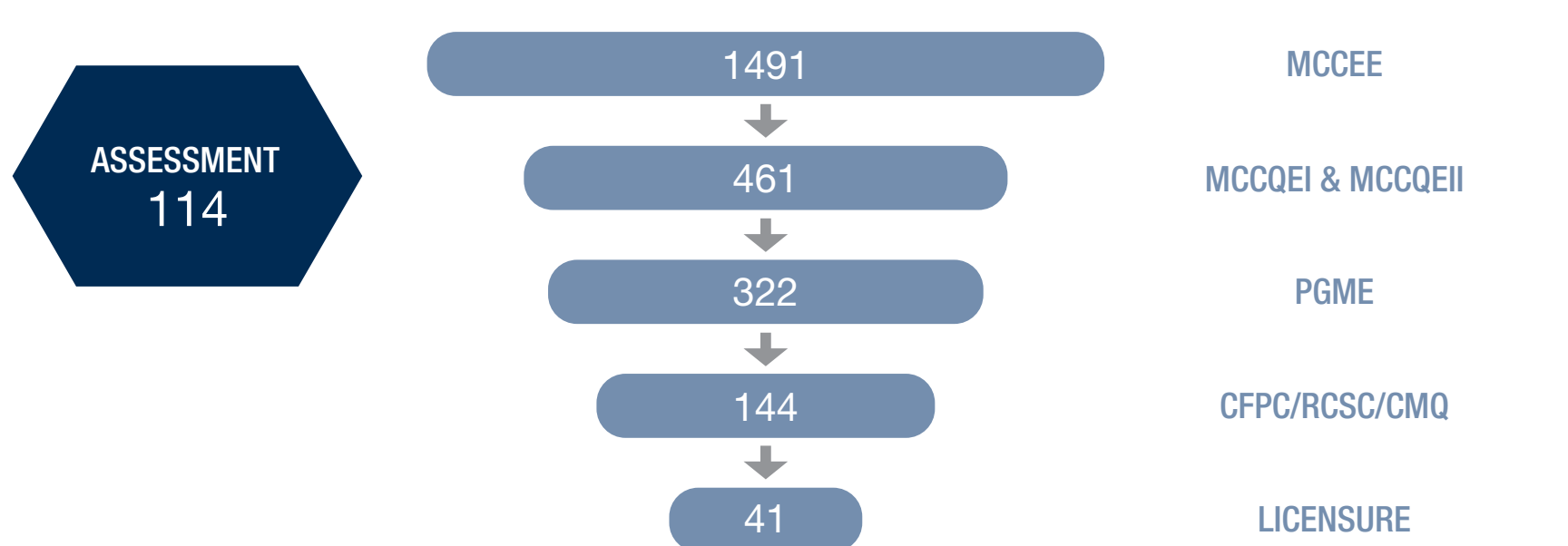
Highly predictive of eventual licensed practice, the number of First Year Post-MD Trainees has continued to increase over the past ten years. The number of those who completed their MD in Canada has risen 64%, while the number of PGY1 IMGs has risen 453% over the same time period.

Chart 5: Percent Entering Post-MD Training by Country of MD Graduation



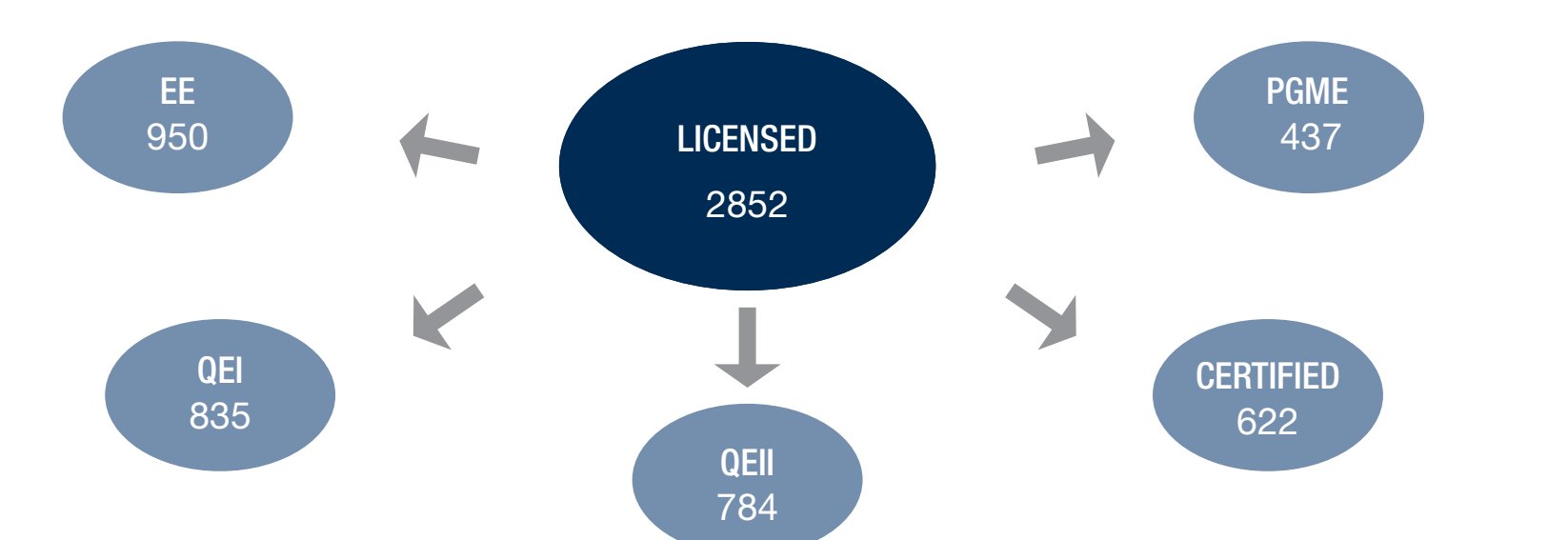
If we select all individuals in the database from 2005-2009, we can analyze their likelihood of successful entry to post-MD training in Canada based on their Country of MD Graduation. Those who completed their MD in Ireland, Australia or the United Kingdom were shown to have over a 50% chance of successfully entering PGME in Canada. Conversely, graduates from the Philippines, Egypt and Bangladesh had less than a 10% chance of successful acceptance into a PGME program.

Chart 6: Following a Cohort of Canadian Citizen IMGs



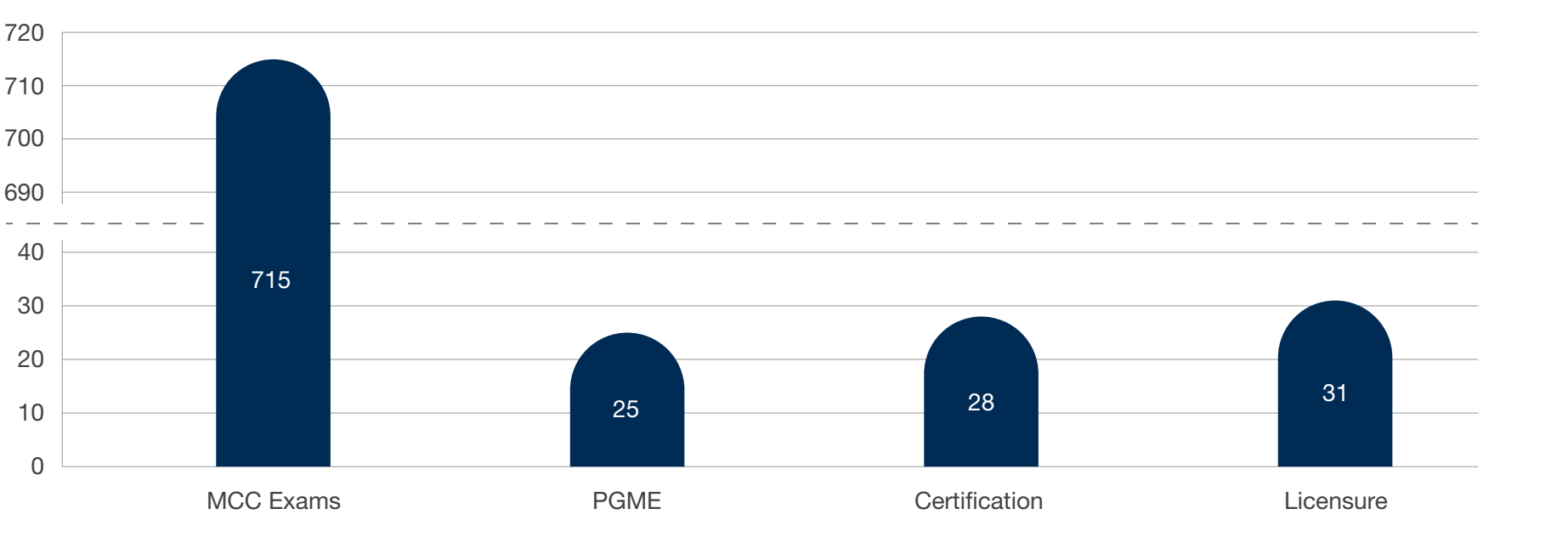
If we select a cohort of Canadian Citizen IMGs who passed their MCCEE between 2005-2007, the database allows us to track them through to 2010 to see what other milestones they have accomplished. Based on this analysis, 461 have completed either the MCCQE1 or MCCQEII, 322 went on to postgraduate training, 144 of these became certified with a Canadian certifying body, and 41 of these IMGs continued on to become licensed with a Canadian Medical Regulatory Authority.

Chart 7: IMG Licensure, 2008-2010



This graphic shows a cohort of individuals who were licensed between 2008-2010 in Canada (2852). The database then allows us to look retrospectively to see which other milestones these IMGs have accomplished. Note – the database only goes back to 2005 and therefore some of these licensed physicians may have completed other milestones prior to our data collection timeframe.

Chart 8: IMG Statement of Need Applicants Having Reached Key Milestones



We are seeing an increasing number of IMGs considering the pursuit of postgraduate training in the United States (measured by the number of Statement of Need Applications). Of those applicants, the majority of them reached the point of having completed one or more MCC Exams (715). Far fewer IMG Statement of Need applicants have reached the point of PGME, Certification or Licensure in Canada.

Footnotes

- 1 Canadian Institute for Health Information (2010). Supply, Distribution and Migration of Canadian Physicians, 2008. Ottawa: CIHI.
- 2 Federal/Provincial/Territorial Advisory Committee on Health Delivery and Human Resources. (2004). Report of the Canadian Task Force on Licensure of International Medical Graduates.
- 3 HRSDC. (2010). A Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications.
- 4 Office of the Fairness Commissioner. Online: www.fairnesscommissioner.ca

Contact

Tamara Brown
tbrown@afmc.ca
613-703-1204

Steve Slade
sslade@afmc.ca
613-730-1204

Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada
Canadian Post-M.D. Education Registry
265 Carling Avenue, Suite 800
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1S 2E1



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L'Association des facultés de médecine du Canada

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