



Delivery of Palliative Care by Physicians in Canada: A Definitions Document

**Endorsed by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada
Specialty Committee in Palliative Medicine**

Background

The purpose of this document is to describe the various roles that physicians play in the delivery of palliative care in Canada and to clarify the terminology and certification/training requirements associated with these roles in order to help regulatory bodies and hiring institutions understand what credentials exist for physicians providing specialist palliative care in Canada.

The Canadian Society of Palliative Care Physicians (CSPCP) believes that every Canadian should have access to high quality palliative care. Achieving this requires a range of physician services including primary and specialist palliative care (from both the College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC) and the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (Royal College) routes) that are well integrated and coordinated with other health professionals across all health care settings, including a patient's home, as described in Framework on Palliative Care in Canada (1).

Presently in Canada:

1. The palliative care needs of Canadians are best met through the provision of palliative care across primary and specialist (secondary and tertiary) levels of care, each of which requires support from physicians with differing levels of expertise and training (see Figure1).
2. Primary palliative care is a required part of core training and a core competency for family physicians, as per the CFPC's Family Medicine Professional Profile published in 2018 (2). Family physicians play an essential role in the delivery of primary palliative care across all care settings.
3. Primary palliative care is becoming a required part of core training for many specialties and subspecialties within the Royal College. All disciplines that care for people with life-threatening conditions need to be able to provide a palliative approach to care.

4. Palliative medicine at a secondary/tertiary level has been evolving since the 1970s and now has two certification routes for recognition of specialized expertise:

- Prior to 2017, there was a one-year training program in Palliative Medicine, the Conjoint training program in Palliative Medicine, jointly accredited by the Royal College and the CFPC. This program was discontinued with the creation of the Royal College Subspecialty in Palliative Medicine.
- Starting in 2015, the CFPC began with the implementation of a Certificate of Added Competence in Palliative Care (CAC-PC) designed to recognize the added competence achieved and maintained by family physicians in palliative care. Initial CAC-PCs were awarded through a leadership route and to previous graduates of one year Enhanced Skills programs. Presently all graduates of Category 1 Enhanced Skills programs in Palliative Care are eligible to apply for CAC-PCs. The CFPC will have a practice eligible route for family physicians who enhance their knowledge base and skills to the level of a CAC-PC while in practice.
- Since 2017, the Royal College has offered a two-year Subspecialty Program in Adult Palliative Medicine through Internal Medicine, Anesthesiology, or Neurology, and Pediatric Palliative Medicine through Pediatrics. Entry from other specialties, including Family Medicine, may occur but must follow completion of the primary specialty training and include the prerequisites of twelve months of clinical medicine-based rotations with a minimum of six months at a senior level, designed to allow achievement of competencies in the consultation and care of complex medical patients, interprofessional care, and effective communication skills. There is a practice eligible route available for those who trained prior to 2019 (3).

Specialist Palliative Care:

In keeping with international and national standards, the terms recommended in Canada for physicians providing specialist palliative care are Palliative Care Consultants and Palliative Medicine Subspecialists.

Currently, the vast majority of Palliative Care Consultants in Canada have initially trained as Family Medicine Specialists. Along with Palliative Medicine Subspecialists, these physicians have advanced competencies in consultant-level palliative care to support patients and families with the most complex needs. They also play an important role in capacity-building and supporting and mentoring primary care practitioners in providing palliative care to their patients. A referral or consult request from a physician providing primary palliative care may occur when that individual has reached the limit of their expertise and/or requires additional support; often these are complex cases or atypical situations involving patients with challenging symptoms requiring advanced intervention or more specialized care settings.

Table 1: summary of the qualifications required by physicians providing specialist palliative care

Mandatory requirements	Canadian undergraduate medical degree or equivalent standard	Certification in Primary Specialty RCPSC, CFPC or equivalent standard	Advanced training/certification in palliative care medicine via:		
			Conjoint Year of Added Competence (prior to 2017)	CFPC CAC in Palliative Care	RCPSC Palliative Medicine Subspecialty certification, or Subspecialist Affiliate status
Palliative Care Consultant	✓	✓	✓or	✓or	✓
Palliative Medicine Subspecialist	✓	✓			✓

It is important that these minimum standards for credentialing of physicians providing specialist palliative care be recognized in Canada and used to support human resource planning and measurement of specialist providers, and establish a benchmark for competency of specialist palliative care. This will help ensure Canadians have access to the appropriate level of palliative care service they need, where and when they need it.

References:

1. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/health-care-system/reports-publications/palliative-care/framework-palliative-care-canada.html>
2. https://www.cfpc.ca/uploadedFiles/About_Us/FM-Professional-Profile.pdf
3. <http://www.royalcollege.ca/rcsite/credentials-exams/exam-eligibility/per-sub/practice-eligibility-route-subspecialists-application-e>
4. <https://www.pallium.ca/about-pallium/>