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

A career in General Surgery is without a doubt one of the most rewarding and interesting careers available. The training is five years long, and the program is designed to make you a skilled surgeon, while still allowing you to practice medicine. General Surgeons pride themselves in being able to manage critically ill and injured patients, something that is sometimes lost in other surgical specialties. Upon completion of the training program, you will have the opportunity to practice as a community surgeon, or pursue further fellowship training. Graduates from our program have been very successful in some of the most competitive fellowship programs in the world. Typical fellowship programs include Trauma and Critical Care, Hepatobiliary and Transplantation, Head and Neck Oncology, Endocrine Surgery, Colorectal Surgery, Surgical Oncology, Thoracic Surgery, Vascular Surgery, Minimally Invasive Surgery, and Pediatric Surgery. The diverse nature of the specialty is what makes General Surgery an attractive career choice.

b) What are some common complaints about your specialty?

The residency program training for General Surgery is busy and sometimes intense but the rewards far outweigh the sacrifices. As in other areas of medicine, General Surgeons have demanding jobs and need to strive for a balance between their professional and personal lives. On the other hand, once training is finished, General Surgeons have control over how many hours they wish to work each week. Many people who do not know the facts suggest that the lifestyle is poor. There is some night work involved, and sometimes the schedule when on-call can be unpredictable (but never boring!). However, many surgeons are now in call groups, which free up most evenings and weekends. The Canadian Association of General Surgeons has recently published guidelines on call frequency, and most surgeons are now on-call one in six nights. This is reasonable and allows for a balanced lifestyle.

2. Why did you choose your specialty?

The diverse nature of the specialty together with the ability to manage the critically ill and injured patient are the reasons most of us chose a career in General Surgery. The satisfaction of having not only the technical skills but the clinical judgment and medical knowledge to treat patients with acute and sometimes life-threatening problems is immense. General Surgeons are masters of a wide range of operations in different areas of the body and this diversity keeps the job interesting and challenging.
3. **What types of clinical cases do you commonly see?**

A General Surgeon will see a wide variety of cases on a daily basis. The typical General Surgeon will take care of multiple injuries in the trauma patient. The Surgeon will also care for patients with biliary tract problems, hernias, bowel obstructions, and vascular disorders. Oncology is a major part of the surgeon’s practice, with a variety of tumors encountered. Surgeons play a major part in the treatment of breast cancer, lymphoma, stomach and colon cancer, pancreatic and biliary tract cancer, sarcomas, and head and neck malignancies, both endocrine and non-endocrine.

4. **Briefly describe a typical day.**

This question is best answered by describing a typical week. Each Surgeon typically has one and a half days in the operating room per week. The OR day starts at 0730 in most hospitals and ends at 1530. The Surgeon will generally spent one to one and a half days in the clinic, seeing new consultations and follow-ups. A day is often spent doing paper work and administrative duties. Many surgeons also spend time performing upper and lower endoscopy each week. A day is usually kept free for emergencies, and the Surgeon often will try to schedule his call duty on that day so that most of the emergency work can be done during the day, freeing up the evening. The Surgeon will often round on the inpatients before the OR or clinic, and will usually round in the afternoon after the days work is finished. Most weekends are free, except when the Surgeon is on call.

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

The lifestyle of a General Surgeon can be varied, just as in any other specialty. The Surgeon can be as busy as he or she wants to be, and the Surgeon can tailor a practice to any lifestyle. Some General Surgeons are heavily involved in research and academics but many are focused primarily on clinical practice. There is much more of an emphasis on having free personal time than there was historically when General Surgeons were ‘on call all the time’

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

Family life is important to all Surgeons, and the specialty of General Surgery can accommodate a fulfilling family life. Many Surgeons are joining forces with other Surgeons to create call schedules that are realistic and allow for a balanced life outside the hospital. Most call groups take turns covering hospital inpatients on weekends to avoid having everyone rounding on their patients every weekend.

6. **Range of incomes?**

Most incomes are currently based on a fee-for-service schedule, and a wide range exists, the amount depending on the number of patients seen, and his or her geographical location. Many Surgeons across Canada are now looking at alternate payment plans, where they are given a very competitive salary in
return for providing specific services. Most plans in Canada will salary the Surgeon at roughly $ 400 000 per year.

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

Over the next decade, there will be a large number of Surgeons retiring, and this will leave many jobs available across the country. This will allow the new Surgeon to have the ability to work in virtually any part of the country, and in a variety of geographical settings. There is also a shift towards performing more and more procedures by minimally invasive (laparoscopic) techniques.

**Residency Program Questions**

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

The candidate must show a genuine interest in General Surgery. This interest will be identified as the student rotates on a General Surgery service. The candidate must have exceptional academic and clinical skills, and must be able to communicate effectively with the patients, their families, and the other team members.

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

The candidate should ensure that his or her preceptor knows there is an interest in Surgery. If possible, the candidate should try to spend some elective time in Surgery so that they can meet other members of the Department.

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

| Legend: |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| GNH = Grey Nuns Community Hospital |
| MIS = Misericordia Community Hospital |
| RAH = Royal Alexandra Hospital |
| UAH = University of Alberta Hospital |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rotation</th>
<th>Effective July 1 2013</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PGY-1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Surgery</td>
<td>5 Blocks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>1 Block</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paediatric Surgery</td>
<td>1 Block</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCU</td>
<td>1 Block</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neurosurgery</td>
<td>1 Block</td>
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<tr>
<td>Plastic Surgery</td>
<td>1 Block</td>
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<tr>
<td>Orthopaedic Surgery</td>
<td>1 Block</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Anaesthesia 1 Block
Vacation 1 Block

Total 13 blocks

**PGY - 2**
- General Surgery 7 blocks
- ICU 3 blocks
- Pathology 1 block
- Thoracic Surgery 2 blocks

Total 13 blocks

**PGY - 3**
- General Surgery UAH or RAH 5 blocks
- General Surgery MIS or GNH 2 blocks
- GI / Endoscopy 2 blocks
- Paediatric General Surgery 2 blocks
- Elective 2 blocks

Total 13 blocks

**PGY - 4**
- Community General Surgery
- Selective 3 blocks
  (Rural Site – either Lethbridge or Grande Praire - or Community Site either GNH or MIS)
- General Surgery UAH or RAH 3 blocks
- Vascular Surgery 2 blocks
- Elective 2 blocks
- Chief 3 blocks

Total 13 blocks

**PGY - 5**
- Chief 10 blocks
- Ambulatory Care 3 blocks

Total 13 blocks

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

The General Surgery Residency Program is a five-year program designed to produce some of the finest Surgeons in Canada. There is a large clinical volume and residents receive an education in all aspects of General Surgery. The program emphasizes the importance of research, and there are opportunities to enter into the Clinician Investigator Program or the Surgeon-Scientist Program.
11. **What is the availability of experiences in subspecialty areas during training?**

There are many subspecialists who teach in the program. The resident will be exposed to all the subspecialty areas of General Surgery during their training. If there is any area in which the resident would like to spend more time, there is time available during the elective rotations to explore these interests. The University of Alberta has faculty members with specialty training in liver transplantation, hepatobiliary surgery, colorectal surgery, endocrine surgery, head and neck surgery, trauma, critical care, surgical oncology, and minimally invasive surgery (MIS) and bariatric surgery. Residents also rotate through services dedicated to vascular surgery and thoracic surgery.

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

There are elective opportunities in the 3rd and 4th years which can be used to explore any specific areas of interest.

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

In general, the residents will be on a 1 in 4 schedule during their in-house rotations. The residents will be in-house for their General Surgery rotations at the University Hospital and the Royal Alexandra Hospital. Chief Residents are on call from home when assigned at these sites. The residents are on call 1 in 3 from home when rotating at the Grey Nuns and Misericordia Hospitals. All call schedules abide by the PARA contract. The residents are encouraged to leave the hospital the morning after being on-call according to the PARA contract.

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

The General Surgery Program at the University of Alberta has a strong tradition of training excellent surgeons. The clinical volume is among the highest of all the programs in Canada. There is a strong emphasis on research, and there are many opportunities throughout the training program to carry out research. All the surgeons in the city are committed to teaching, and this is reflected in the excellent teaching our residents receive. There are few programs in North America with such clinical volume, research opportunities, and dedicated teachers.

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

Karee Moffatt, Program Assistant for Undergraduate Surgical Education, would be happy to answer any questions regarding student electives or shadowing. She can be contacted at 780 735-5961 or by e-mail gensurg@ualberta.ca. Dr. Kamran Fathimani is the Residency Program Director, and he can be contacted through phone number 780 407-6325 or via e-mail at kfathima@ualberta.ca.
b) Specifically, is there a list of residents whom we can call or email?

EAMER, Gil R5  eamer@ualberta.ca *contact re CIP (MSc)
ANDERSON, Blaire R5  blanders@ualberta.ca *contact re Rural Stream program
LEES, Mackenzie R4  mlees@ualberta.ca
KAMEL, Fady R3  fkamel@ualberta.ca

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

General Surgery is traditionally a competitive program but the numbers of applicants do fluctuate from year to year. This year we are anticipating a significant increase in the number of applicants at this university and across the country. Graduates from our program are exceptional surgeons, and many have succeeded in obtaining competitive fellowship positions. Many surgeons start practicing immediately on graduation, and they all feel well prepared for the task.

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

Each resident is required to present at the annual research day a minimum of 3 times during the course of their residency. The research is presented at a General Surgery Research Day each spring. Residents are encouraged to enter an MSc or PhD program if they have a strong interest in research.

b) What role does research play in your career?

Research plays an important part in the career of a Surgeon. The fields of medicine and surgery are continually evolving and it is through research that we are able to continue improving the care that we deliver to our patients. Research activity highlights the importance of critical thinking and analysis, both of which are necessary as a practicing surgeon.

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

At a local level, interested students should attend the Divisional Research Day and the Department of Surgery Research Day. Information is available on the Department of Surgery web site https://www.ualberta.ca/medicine/departments/surgery and on the General Surgery web site http://www.generalsurgery.med.ualberta.ca/awards.html. The Alberta Association of General Surgeons holds a meeting every year in Banff, and interested students are encouraged to attend. At the national level, the Canadian Association of General Surgeons holds an annual meeting. This is an excellent forum to meet residents and surgeons from across the country (www.cags-accg.ca).