FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS - 2016

Specialty/Field Questions:

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

Medical Microbiology bridges the gap between clinical and lab specialty – and so you have the best of both worlds. The work hours are relatively comfortable and regular and most jobs provide a steady (and quite competitive) income. There is a good balance between work and home/family life and your financial future is fairly predictable and secure.

b) What are some common complaints your specialty?

There are still very few microbiologists in Canada, and about half of them are aged 55 or more, so there are (and will be) a lot of jobs – and a lot of work to do! Also, you will not have primary hands-on contact with patients – more so in a consulting capacity.

2. Why did you choose your specialty?

I liked the idea of doing something that would immediately make a difference. I could find out what is causing the patient’s illness (the microorganism) and knew what to do to cure it (the antibiotic). I liked the fact I am being asked for advice by other physicians, and that I get to see the birds-eye view of all infections in my hospital through the lab – not just my own patients, like the ID physicians… At the same time, I always get to do cases within my area of interest (infections), as a consultant, and don’t have to do the plain and simple case load.

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

Infections – all types/systems, all ages; urinary tract infections, sepsis, meningitis, transplant associated infections, and many of the fascinating parasites.

4. Briefly describe a typical day.

Clinical consultations, lab problem solving, investigations of outbreaks, meetings, teaching various learners, research. Lots of phone consultations.

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

There is a very broad variety since there is time available for family or other activities. It is up to the individual. Some people concentrate on career and promotion, others work part time to take care of the family, do extracurricular activities or further their education. There is no in-hospital call (you only have to be available by pager and can do most of the work from home when you are on call)

b) Specifically, how able is your specialty to accommodate family life?
Most positions have defined (9 a.m. – 5 p.m.) hours. Call is light and can be done from home. Part time work is also possible, so one can adjust the workload to accommodate personal life (e.g., pregnancy, parenthood).

6. Range of incomes?

Please contact us directly – this varies from province to province.

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

There is an acute shortage of Microbiologists in the country and about half of them are aged 55 or more so more vacancies will arise as current staff proceed to retirement.

Residency Program Questions:

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

Evidence of interest (electives, research etc.) in the specialty

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

Organize electives or job shadowing rotations. Get involved in a research project related to microbiology.

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

The program is a five year program. There is a basic clinical year, 1 advanced clinical year, 2 core lab years, 1 optional (elective) year. The program allows for a great deal of flexibility to address the needs of the trainees and the job market, so sequence and content may vary (within RCPSC requirements).

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

The program is based on cooperation between several departments and institutions and flexibility, attempting to expose the resident to as many experiences as possible.

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

Flexibility is possible and encouraged. This ensures good access to a broad range of experiences, in and out of the province and Canada. Residents have taken part in electives at the National Microbiology Laboratory (Winnipeg), Center for Disease Control (Atlanta), Centre for Disease Control (B.C.), Mayo Clinic (Rochester), Manila, Australia, Hong Kong, and South Africa.

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

Microbiology includes a full year of electives.

13. What is the on-call schedule during each year of residency?
Call load follows the PARA agreement. Call is done from home and the workload is usually light but involves coming in for several hours on weekends.

14. What distinguishes the U of A program from other programs?
We have a unique situation here - a collaboration between large tertiary hospital diagnostic lab (UAH), university research labs, large volume community focused diagnostic lab (private, DynaLife) and Provincial Lab for Public Health, not to mention the basic and highly complex clinical services, and close collaboration with several other residency programs, available to the Micro residents – from community hospitals to STI clinics and transplant programs. This program is also the largest one in Canada so there is a group of learners to work, learn and socialize with.

15. a) Who can we contact for more information or to set up electives?
Please contact the Program Administrator – Nancy Cheung at 780-492-2306 or through email at nrcheung@ualberta.ca

b) Specifically, is there a list of residents whom we can call or email?
Please contact Nancy for information

16. a) Is there active and/or required research in your residency program?
Yes – it is a Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (RCPSC) requirement. The U of A program is a part of the Department of Medical Microbiology and Immunology (http://www.mmi.med.ualberta.ca/index.php) as well as other University departments so there are plenty of opportunities to fulfill the research requirement. There are also many research opportunities within the clinical (lab) department at the University of Alberta hospital and Public Health Laboratory.

b) What role does research play in your career?
Microbiologists spend anywhere form 10 – 100% of their time on research depending on the nature of the position held.

17. What local, national or international conferences would be of benefit to candidates interested in your residency program?
Association of Medical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases Canada (AMMI)
American Society for Microbiology (ASM)
European Society of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases (ESCMID)
IDWeek (Infectious Diseases Society of America)

Residents are encouraged to present at the conferences they attend. Funding is available to cover some costs associated with attending conferences.