

THE FULL TIME CLINICAL TEACHER

Recommendations for Academic Success

The Department of Medicine at the University of Alberta has had numerous inquiries, particularly from faculty members just beginning their careers, about how to succeed in academic medicine, particularly if one is designated as a full time “clinical teacher”. The recommendations below emerge from advice given to this question over recent years by the Department Chair, divisional directors and mentors in the Department of Medicine.

1. Stay in regular touch with an academic mentor; share with her concerns you have about your academic progress or anything that may be interfering in your academic progress.
2. Seek from your Divisional Director at least annually an appraisal of your performance and direction.
3. Try to work within your job description; if your time commitments begin to alter from those that were intended upon appointment, discuss them with your Divisional Director to either get them back on track or change your job description.
4. As an academic physician, you are expected to be a leader in your field. If your job description is that of a full time clinical teacher, the routes to leadership include:

K Becoming known as an excellent physician who is a role model to students, residents and other faculty members;

K Becoming a superb teacher; taking courses and workshops on improving your teaching in lectures, small groups, at the bedside. Winning or being runner up for teacher of the year awards are all ways to distinguish yourself as a teacher.

K Becoming involved and playing as important a role as possible in clinical research; searching for ways to improve you skills at clinical research such as taking courses offered by the Dept of Public Health Services or taking a mini-sabbatical designed for this purpose.

K Writing!! Be alert during your clinical practice for the unusual and write it up for clinical journals. Read medical journals to determine what areas are ripe for in-depth analysis. Identify special areas of interest, become the most knowledgeable local person in that field and write about your experiences in it.

K Writing!! Identify areas of teaching that interest you and look for potential research projects in these areas. Ideas for research can come from many sources: your own observations while teaching, reading the journals in the area (such as Academic Medicine, Medical Teacher, Medical Education, Teaching and Learning in Medicine), joining and attending the national meetings of the Canadian Association for Medical Education and the Association of American Medical Colleges (automatic subscription to Academic Medicine). Pick an area of special interest to you and become known to others as an expert in that field.

5. Become involved in the professional organizations in your field at the provincial level and eventually at the national level. Contribute actively to the success of these organizations and you will gain the national exposure which may be helpful at promotion time.
6. During the first five years of your career, concentrate on developing the academic area which most interests you. By the end of the first five years of your career, you should have established clear directions and should be publishing regularly, though not necessarily often.
7. Though you should protect your time early in your career, you also want to integrate yourself into your division and department through active participation in the lives of those units. Avoid sitting on a lot of committees but pick a few which interest you and on which you feel you might be able to make a contribution; serve these committees well and your career will be well-served.
8. Though it is not a formal requirement, the way you interact with others at all levels is an important factor in your success. Open, friendly, dependable, honest communication with colleagues, nurses, clerks, secretaries, research assistants, etc. will always be more helpful to you than you can ever measure. Spend some time regularly to evaluate the feedback (direct or indirect) you get from others about your behaviour and don't always assume that they are wrong.
9. Prepare a comprehensive and accurate curriculum vitae and teaching dossier; the better you become at recording your academic activities and accomplishments, the better will you be able to represent your best interests at times of promotion and merit increment consideration. The teaching dossier is particularly important since teaching is a difficult area to measure objectively.
10. Whenever you teach a class or supervise a clinical rotation, ensure that your students evaluate your performance on the forms they have or will be given. The more data that accumulates to verify you as a good teacher, the better your chances for promotion.