

Transition Options for Internationally-Trained Professionals

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The dilemma of the internationally-trained professional is one that has received much attention recently. It is a complicated issue which involves a variety of stakeholders including government and regulatory bodies, healthcare providers, as well as the general



public. The Ontario Society of Medical Technologists (OSMT) has a responsibility to the stakeholders to certify qualified medical laboratory assistants and technicians (hereafter referred to as MLA/Ts) in order to maintain the high standards employers have come to depend on.

As Chair of the Certification Committee and MLA/T Director-At-Large for the OSMT, I am responsible for reviewing applications from candidates interested in challenging the OSMT MLA/T certification exam. Many of these individuals have received quality education, training, and work experience in foreign countries, yet they find barriers here in Canada to practicing their skills. Some are medical laboratory technologists or doctors hoping to get OSMT certification for employment. However, in order to be eligible to write the exam, candidates must follow certain criteria, one of which is Canadian work experience in the medical laboratory field. Herein lies the dilemma. “How do I get experience without certification and how do I get certification without experience?” I hope to shed some light on this quandary.

A number of organizations are working to make the transition for internationally-trained professionals a little smoother and employment a reality. A great place to start is the internet. The OSMT has a list of schools which provide short preparatory courses for those who qualify. The website is www.osmt.org. Click on “Lab Assistant Exam Approved Review/Refresher Courses.” Another organization, the Toronto Region Immigrant Council or TRIEC is a multi-stakeholder group working to improve access to employment for immigrants in the Toronto region. Their website is www.triec.ca.

The Michener Institute for Applied Health Sciences in Toronto is also a great resource for aspiring MLA/Ts. They offer a review course for OSMT certification via the flexibility of correspondence. Other offerings are venipuncture workshops for those in need of phlebotomy experience. Check out their website at www.michener.on.ca.

Robetech Institute in Toronto specializes in healthcare training and has recently compiled a program geared specifically for the internationally-trained medical laboratory technologist. Known as Fast Track Training, the program offers a shortened version of their Medical Laboratory Technician course and the flexibility to allow students to keep working while they study. For more information on Robetech’s programs call the institute at 416-466-6107.

As you can see there are no shortages of training institutes offering a variety of venues to brush up on skills or even learn new ones. If one wants to jump right in however and bypass the training to gain work experience, you can just knock on doors. I myself am employed by a private diagnostic laboratory. This sector does not as yet require OSMT certification as a condition of employment. If you have any kind of medical training and or experience and are legally entitled to work in Canada you would have a good chance

of gaining employment in this sector. Another possibility would be in a private practice setting for physicians. All it takes is leg work and research. Talk to people in the field they love to share their knowledge.

In closing, I hope I have provided some ideas for those individuals feeling frustrated at not being able to practice their chosen profession. The stipulation for Canadian work experience as a prerequisite for writing the OSMT MLA/T certification exam is a gauge for assessment of a candidate's skills. Since the OSMT is not a college or training institute it has no way of determining the applicant's practical skill set. Thus, the Canadian experience, together with the successful completion of the exam becomes the tool with which we can confidently bestow the title "OSMT Certified MLA/T" on our candidates. For further information on becoming certified visit the OSMT website.