

Inspiration for a Canadian School of Internal Medicine

Alexandre Lafleur MD



About the Author

Alexandre Lafleur is a 4th-year internal medicine resident at Université Laval in Quebec City, Quebec. He is the winner of the 2010 CSIM travel award. He has a special interest in the field of medical education. Correspondence may be directed to alexandre.lafleur.1@ulaval.ca.

The 13th European School of Internal Medicine (ESIM) was held in Brighton, England, in July 2010. The CSIM gave me the opportunity to attend this international event, the only trainee from North America. About 50–70 general internal medicine (GIM) residents from all over the world (mainly from European countries) met, and heard lectures topics of common interest. In my opinion, ESIM should be a source of inspiration for a Canadian School of Internal Medicine, to promote and strengthen a sense of pride and group spirit among the future leaders of our specialty. Dr. Chris Davidson, director of ESIM 2010, wrote: “Although the focus was on Internal medicine as a cornerstone of future healthcare systems, many other aspects of professional and personal life were discussed. We believe that the links formed this week among potential leaders of Internal medicine are vital for the future of the speciality. Indeed this is a key objective of the School and the Federation [European Federation of Internal Medicine].”

The first objective of ESIM was to share knowledge in internal medicine. Each country put on an interactive clinical case presentation. We realized that although there are many differences between the definitions of GIM in European countries, we all face acutely ill patients with complex or multiple diseases, and use a similar diagnostic and therapeutic approach in their management. “All GIM residents seem to have the same global perspective of the patient supported by a wide range of knowledge,” stated my colleague from France.

ESIM is also a forum for discussions about the role of European GIM specialists, their training programs, and the future of the specialty in general terms. Canadian internists may seem less valued within the health care system; they may lack formal specialty recognition by the Royal College. However, I believe Canada is the best place in the world to train and practise GIM. My European colleagues were impressed by the popularity of GIM as a career option among our post-graduate trainees.

Although all residents agreed that generalism is beneficial for a patient-centred cost effective health system, many reported that their system encourages sub-specialization, decreasing and even abolishing the role of the internist.

Workshops offer a great opportunity to highlight European initiatives in medical education, for example, funded research opportunities included within the residency training period; more outpatient clinic experience; flexibility to train in part in other European countries; and a work schedule influenced by the European Union’s 48-hours time directive. Canada seemed to be a leader in internal medicine education and clinical skills evaluation; the CanMEDS competencies were known to, and used in, a growing number of countries. The future of GIM training would undoubtedly benefit from a similar meeting of Canadian residents coming from coast to coast.

ESIM was an occasion for all participants to create long-lasting relationships and a team spirit that will serve our specialty well. The recipe is quite simple: limit the number of participants to 60 trainees and select residents from different universities sharing the same interest for the future of GIM. Different from a formal conference, the school is designed as an interactive team learning experience. I believe that Canadian residents should continue to attend such international events, but we should also create a similar networking opportunity within our own country.

As former ESIM director Antonio Martins Baptista has said, “The school is about opening your mind and opening your heart.” Judging by the way my European colleagues and I lived the experience, it is really about opening our minds to other ways of practice and training and heading back home with a renewed passion and pride for our future as GIM specialists.

