The College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC) conducts the Certification Examination in Family Medicine twice a year, in the spring and fall, at multiple centres across Canada in English and French.

The 2021 Certification Examination in Family Medicine was based on the written component of the examination, the computer-based short-answer management problems (SAMPs), as a requirement for first-time candidates for this year only. The written component of the examination took place from Thursday, October 14 through Tuesday, October 19, 2021. It was four hours in length with an optional 15-minute break.

The new virtual simulated office oral (SOO) component of the Certification Examination in Family Medicine was introduced to candidates repeating the exam from an attempt prior to 2020 who require the SOO for certification. The new virtual SOO examination was launched on November 6, 2021, and it will be expanded to all candidates in spring 2022.

A total of 489 candidates sat the examination. Of these, 34 candidates sat the SAMP and the new virtual SOO exam, 42 candidates sat the new virtual SOO exam only, and 413 candidates sat the SAMP only.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has prevented the College from delivering the SOOs in their traditional, in-person format, it has also provided an opportunity to identify and improve virtual delivery of the SOO examination experience for candidates and examiners in several ways, including:

- Greater convenience and enhanced flexibility as candidates and examiners may not need to travel
- Optimal and progressive use of technology to support high-quality examination delivery
- Avoidance of sudden obstacles or limitations that the pandemic or other unanticipated circumstances or environmental factors could cause

The development of and planning for the new virtual SOO was conducted using best practice processes, comprehensive preparation plans, and consultation with subject matter experts.

The development of the project timeline started in January 2021 with the Board of Directors decision to offer the examination virtually for repeating candidates. The project team was created in March 2021 and a request for proposals was drafted, approved, and sent to pre-selected vendors. The vendor selection process was completed in June 2021, and a contract was signed with Fry-IT (vendor) in July 2021. The CFPC exam team platform orientation started in June 2021, and communications plans were approved and initiated. Examiner recruitment was completed in August 2021. The communications plan approved and initiated examiner recruitment completed in September 2021.

User acceptance testing (UAT) was completed in October 2021, with four rounds of testing. The pilot testing was completed with two rounds of testing. The dry runs were completed with six rounds of testing. Candidate readiness included instructional videos, audio recordings, and written materials, a frequently asked questions document, and a platform technical user guide. Examiner training included a workshop on performance assessment of patient-centred approach, identifying a range of judgment biases, and managing the impact of bias in assessment.
Exam Administration Details

Written Examination

Mode of delivery

- 32% Remotely proctored exam
- 68% Test-site exam

One-third of candidates opted for remote proctoring of their exam. Public health restrictions on indoor gatherings limited the number of people that could be accommodated at test centres.

Language of choice

- 13% French
- 87% English

More than three-quarters of candidates took the exam in English.

Technical difficulties

- 1.1% of candidates experienced significant technical difficulties and alternative options were made available to them.

With effective communication channels in place, the CFPC was able to solve problems in a professional and consistent manner.

Eligibility route

- 43% Residency-eligible
- 57% Practice-eligible

More than half of the candidates qualified through the practice-eligible route.

Oral Examination

Examiners team structure

- Chief Examiner
- 5x SOO Leads
- 2x Assistant SOO Leads
- 45x SOO Examiner

This year for the first time a Chief Examiner coordinated the SOO Leads and provided extensive support to examiners and CFPC staff throughout the planning process and on the exam day.

Candidate and examiner support

To ensure secure, effective, and seamless candidate and examiner support:

- 16 Member in-person command centre
- 5 Platform/technical support staff
- 18 Proctors/observers per session

All 76 candidates successfully completed the exam and none had to be rescheduled. Out of 380 discrete examiner/candidate interactions, only four candidates had technical issues in an SOO station. The CFPC team worked with the candidates to schedule the reruns on the same day.

Language of choice

- 4% French
- 96% English

Preparation for the spring administration of SOOs for all eligible candidates is under way. The CFPC is dedicated to working with committees, schools, and resident groups to address unique challenges related to exams. We welcome your ongoing engagement and invite you to share your concerns by emailing ccfpexam@cfpc.ca.

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