

Saudi medical trainees may keep posts in Canada

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Saudi Arabia won't require its medical residents and fellows to leave Canada, at least until they have found new positions elsewhere.

Saudi Arabia will allow 1053 medical trainees to continue their training in Canada, despite a diplomatic dispute between the countries.

Early this month, Saudi Arabia recalled its medical residents and fellows after Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland urged the kingdom to release jailed human-rights activists.

This week, however, [Saudi Arabia told the trainees they could stay in Canada](#) until they find alternative placements in other countries. Those who have already left Canada or taken a leave of absence [may also return to their posts](#). Thousands of other Saudi students studying

in Canada will still have to leave the country.

The new directive will effectively allow most medical trainees to finish their programs, as it can take years to secure another placement. It also ends weeks of uncertainty for Canadian teaching hospitals that rely upon the foreign trainees' service.

For decades, Saudi Arabia has had an arrangement under which its medical residents and fellows train in Canada. The kingdom pays \$100 000 a year per trainee, in addition to covering the costs of their salaries.

The sudden termination of this program exposed how dependent Canada

has become on Saudi-funded trainees, who make up 95% of all international trainees in Canada. These trainees have never competed with Canadians for residency positions. However, according to a [recent CMAJ editorial](#), reliable international funding has likely enabled governments to scale back domestic funding for residency spots.

"What began as a symbiotic relationship may have led to a dangerous dependency, evolving now to the paradox of simultaneously understaffed programs and unmatched trainees," argued the authors.

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