New Physicians to British Columbia

An orientation for international doctors transitioning to practice in British Columbia

1. KNOW YOUR LICENSE TYPE

- [ ] Understand whether you're under the Provisional, Assessment class, Associate Physician, or Visiting Physician class through CPSBC (College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia).
- [ ] Review your scope of practice, supervision requirements, and renewal conditions carefully.
- [ ] Know who your supervising physician or medical leader is if you are working under a Health Authority

2. BILLING & INCOME STRUCTURE

- [ ] In BC, doctors are mainly paid through fee-for-service (FFS) and the longitudinal Family Physician (LFP) model from the MSC Payment Schedules. They may also receive compensation via salaries, contracts, or a mix of both. For billing, BC doctors must ensure accurate billing under their MSP number, understanding their business arrangements and payment methods beforehand. Learn more.

3. TAX & INCORPORATION ESSENTIALS

- [ ] Once eligible, consider incorporating a medical practice — it can reduce taxes and allow income deferral.
- [ ] File for a CRA Business Number and set up GST/PST accounts if needed.
- [ ] Meet with an accountant and a workplace lawyer who works with physicians before you sign your first contract.
- [ ] Keep in mind that taxes in BC might be progressive and higher than in other countries.

4. GET TO KNOW THE HEALTH SYSTEM

- [ ] Health care is publicly funded and run by regional health authorities (e.g., Fraser Health, Island Health, Vancouver Coastal Health, Interior Health).
- [ ] Learn your local authority's credentialing system and EMR (Electronic Medical Records) platform.
- [ ] Expect collaboration with nurses, pharmacists, and family physicians to be highly emphasized.

5. FIND OPPORTUNITIES

- [ ] Finding job opportunities as a new physician in BC can be challenging. We offer the essential tools and resources to help you secure a position with confidence.

6. MALPRACTICE & PROFESSIONAL PROTECTION

- [ ] Join the CMPA (Canadian Medical Protective Association) for mandatory medico-legal protection.
- [ ] Confirm your CMPA class matches your license type.
- [ ] Always maintain professional liability coverage from day one of clinical work.

7. BANKING, CURRENCY, AND FINANCES

- [ ] Open a Canadian bank account early — many banks have newcomer physician programs.
- [ ] Consider a cross-country financial advisor for financial planning and cross-country tax implications.

8. HOUSING & COST OF LIVING

- [ ] BC's housing market, especially in Metro Vancouver and Victoria, is competitive and expensive. Renting first is highly recommended; landlords often require employment letters and credit checks.
- [ ] If buying, you'll need to establish a Canadian credit history — start early with local credit cards and utilities in your name.
- [ ] Check local platforms like BC Housing, REW.ca, or Zumper for rentals.

9. DRIVER'S LICENSE & TRANSPORTATION

- [ ] You can use your foreign driver's license for up to 90 days after arrival in BC. If your country of origin has a reciprocal agreement with BC, you are able to exchange your licence directly. Check with ICBC to see if additional tests are required.
- [ ] Get BC auto insurance.
- [ ] Familiarize yourself with winter driving conditions if moving outside the Lower Mainland.

10. IMMIGRATION & FAMILY LIFE

- [ ] Ensure your work permit aligns with your employment status or apply for Permanent Residency (PR) if long-term.
- [ ] Spouses of health care workers may qualify for open work permits.
- [ ] Apply for BC MSP coverage as soon as possible, as there is a 3-month waiting period, so consider private insurance for the gap.
- [ ] Your children can enroll in public schools once you have proof of residence.

11. CULTURAL & LIFESTYLE ADAPTATION

- [ ] Canadian medical culture is team-based, humble, and patient-centred — less hierarchical than many other countries.
- [ ] Take time to learn the unwritten norms: respectful communication, collaboration with other medical staff, and modest self-presentation.
- [ ] Join Doctors of BC for advocacy, insurance discounts, and community connections.

BONUS TIPS PHYSICIANS OFTEN MISS

- [ ] Register for Mainpro+ (CFPC) or MOC (RCPSC) for continuing professional development — required to renew your license.
- [ ] Get a Canadian cell plan before arrival (e.g., Telus, Rogers, or Bell). Doctors of BC members have discounts through Telus.
- [ ] Keep digital copies of your medical school transcripts, certifications, and ID — they're often needed again for credentialing.
- [ ] Familiarize yourself with BC's privacy laws (PIPA) — they differ slightly from U.S. HIPAA or other countries' privacy laws.
- [ ] Learn about climate and regional variation — BC is huge; practice in Vancouver is very different from Kelowna or Prince George.