

# “THE JOY IS THERE”

PROFILE:  
DR. DEBORAH OBU

## International medical graduate happy to be practising in Canada

There are many reasons Dr. Deborah Obu is thrilled to be practising in Ashcroft, BC. She mentions the “phenomenal” weather, the welcoming community, and the fact that her three children can run around outdoors in safety. But it’s the work satisfaction that she raves about.

“We have an opportunity to be a jack-of-all-trades here,” she says. She is currently one of only two physicians staffing the hospital in this town of 1,628\*, which also serves other communities in the area. She loves the experience gained in rural medicine, saying, “The joy is there as well as the job satisfaction.” She now encourages residents she meets at conferences to try it.

Dr. Obu is one of the successful family physician candidates assessed through Practice Ready Assessment (PRA)-BC, a relatively new PRA program, which started assessing family practice international medical graduates (IMGs) in 2015. To date, 39 candidates have successfully completed the program and are now working in rural communities throughout BC, according to Program Coordinator Mary Chinni. A group of 17 candidates currently undergoing clinical field assessment will join that number soon.

PRA-BC’s candidates have come from 14 different countries, of which the most common points of origin are South Africa, Nigeria, Iraq and Egypt.

Dr. Obu was born in England, but her parents are from Nigeria, where she attended medical school. She later trained and worked in Dublin, Ireland, where her husband was also a physician. They decided to try life in Canada and learned about opportunities through Health Match BC, a provincially funded free recruitment service for health-care professionals.

\* 2011 census



Upon coming to Canada, Dr. Obu applied for PRA-BC. The first step was multiple-choice, therapeutic decision-making (TDM) and objective structured clinical exams (OSCE). The program’s Clinical Director, Dr. Jack Burak, explains that this centralized assessment component has an 87 per cent pass rate to date. This is confirmed by Dr. Obu’s experience.

At first, PRA-BC used its own exams for these initial assessments, but in 2016 it brought in the Medical Council of Canada Evaluating Examination (MCCEE) and the new PRA TDM exam. It plans to introduce the NAC OSCE in 2018 and replace the MCCEE with the Medical Council of Canada Qualifying Examination (MCCQE) Part I in 2019.

Following the centralized assessment, Dr. Obu attended orientation sessions on working in BC, given by physicians and allied medical professionals “who are very experienced and have the inside view of practising in BC.” She found the orientation intense: “It was a good eye-opener.”

National  
Assessment  
Collaboration

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Then it was on to clinical field assessment. Dr. Burak notes that this assessment has a 100 per cent pass rate to date, “but I don’t want to give the impression that we will have that rate forever.”

“Whatever concerns any of us had were addressed,” says Dr. Obu of the PRA-BC program. “Although intense, I really enjoyed it.” She believes that PRA programs are a good way to help IMGs bridge into Canadian practice. “It puts you on a par with your Canadian colleagues. At the end of the day, you are expected to know as much as a Canadian-trained physician.”

“You hear about international physicians in Canada working as security guards or driving taxis. It really saddens me.”

However, in BC, although that story is relatively common, the rate of IMGs in practice is very high, Dr. Burak said. IMGs account for 28 to 29 per cent of all BC registered physicians. They are urgently needed, as nearly half of the physician

workforce is over age 55, and retirements are increasing. As in other provinces and territories, staffing in rural and remote communities is also a gap that PRA is filling.

Dr. Obu chose Ashcroft in the BC interior about 100 kilometres west of Kamloops, partly because she preferred a warm, dry climate after spending many years in rainy Ireland. However, she also wanted the opportunity to work in the emergency department of the hospital, as she has worked in emergency medicine in Ireland.

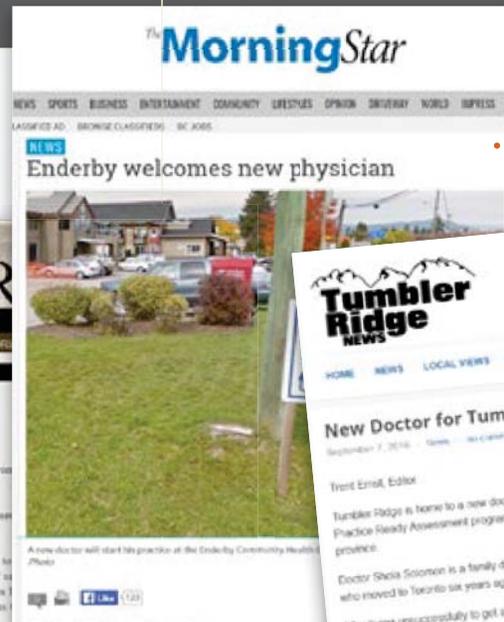
“I have heard nothing but very positive comments from every community that has received one of our PRA-BC candidates who have successfully passed,” said Dr. Burak. “They are ecstatic to have new physicians in their community providing essential primary care to the community.”

PRA-BC physicians featured prominently in their communities.

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