

Carmscast Episode 01: Preparing for your emergency medicine elective

Introduction:

Welcome to Carmscast, the podcast that aims to answer all the questions medical students have when creating a competitive CARMS application. In today's episode, we cover how to best prepare for your upcoming emergency medicine elective. Our expert guest is Dr. Brent Thoma. Dr. Brent Thoma works clinically as a trauma and emergency medicine physician. Academically, he studies technology-enhanced medical education and works for the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada as a Clinician Educator. He is also the CEO of CanadiEM.

Questions

1. What differentiates an average performing medical student on an EM elective, from a rockstar medical student who is exceeding expectations? (1:55)
2. What resources would you recommend to medical students wanting to impress on their EM electives? (5:56)
3. As an attending, what traits do you look for in medical students when writing a strong letter of recommendation? (9:03)
4. The idea of asking for reference letters can be a scary process, especially in EM where students may only work with the same attending for two or three shifts. When should a student consider asking for a reference letter? Are there any tips on how to go about asking in a confident manner? (11:30)
5. When we ask for a letter of reference, it often feels like we are asking a lot from the staff that we are working with. Is there anything we can do to make writing a letter easier for the staff that we work with? (14:47)
6. We may only get to work with an individual staff for 2-3 shifts during an elective, some for only 1 shift. If we get along really well with a particular staff on elective should we or can we request to work with them again? (16:44)
7. Along that same mindset, if there is a staff who you are interested in working with during your elective, but have maybe not had the opportunity to work with in your core rotations, would you recommend reaching out and asking to work with them? I am thinking more of staff who students may have had the opportunity to work with through lectures or sim group sessions. (18:05)

8. Often electives are a useful time to introduce yourself to the program director, for many this can be an intimidating process, do you have any advice on how to go about doing so? (20:40)
9. In terms of connecting with program directors, would you suggest emailing them before you go on elective or introduce yourself in person? When is a good time to introduce yourself to the program director? (22:37)
10. Although in this year's application cycle, out of province electives are unfortunately not happening due to COVID, I am sure other third year students are listening to this podcast who will hopefully have access to out of province electives. Do you have any advice for these students preparing for an EM Elective with a hospital & staff that they are unfamiliar with? (24:01)
11. An 8 week elective cap was recently introduced for final year medical students across Canada. This means that there is a maximum of 8 weeks of emergency medicine electives that a medical student can sign up for. What are your thoughts between balancing networking with programs across Canada, while still performing well for your home site (assuming there is an EM program at your home site as well)? Ideally, everyone wants a reference letter from their home school, is there value in asking for this in your core rotations, even though you may not be as strong clinically when compared to your fourth year of clerkship? (26:30)
12. How do you feel the 8-week elective cap will impact the overall carms process? (28:56)
13. It sounds as though, because there is only 8 weeks any one student would have in emergency medicine (or another competitive specialty), programs may start looking more closely at a student's CV and what students are doing extracurricularly to determine how much they are interested in emergency medicine or any other specialty. What are your thoughts on this? (31:48)
14. Finally, we would be remiss not to mention the current situation with COVID-19. Out of province electives are cancelled across the country for medical students, and this year we will only be able to participate in electives at our own medical schools. This decreases the opportunity for networking between medical students and emergency medicine programs. Do you have any advice on how to approach electives in these unprecedented times? (34:40)
15. Thank you, I feel like we've covered a lot of ground in this interview. Is there anything else you would like to add before we end our interview today? (36:47)

References mentioned in today's episode:

- [CanadiEM CaRMS Guide](#)
- [Crackcast](#) - @crack_cast
- [Clerkcast](#) - @clerk_cast
- [Academic Life in Emergency Medicine - The Case of the Difficult Consult](#)
- [A transparent and defensible process for applicant selection within a Canadian emergency medicine residency program](#) - Paterson et al., CJEM