



The Canadian Society
of Clinical Perfusion

La Société Canadienne
de Perfusion Clinique

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**WHITE PAPER:
ADVANCING THE FUTURE OF CLINICAL
PERFUSION IN CANADA**



Advancing the Future of Clinical Perfusion in Canada

The field of clinical perfusion in Canada is at a critical juncture. The results from the 2025 Team Leaders and Individual Members Surveys highlight the profession's achievements and ongoing challenges. This paper aims to shed light on key workforce concerns, operational inefficiencies, and potential threats to professional autonomy while also recognizing the invaluable contributions of Canadian perfusionists. With evidence-based references, we advocate for improved working conditions, administrative leadership, and strategies to ensure sustainability in this essential field.

Workforce Challenges and Staffing Concerns

Survey results reveal a significant workforce strain across Canadian perfusion departments. With an average of 8.7 full-time equivalents (FTEs) per department, 39 vacant positions, and an anticipated 66 retirements within five years, the profession faces an urgent need for workforce planning.

Key staffing challenges include:

- High attrition rates, with departments reporting losses to the U.S., largely driven by a significant disparity in remuneration.
- An aging workforce, with 29% planning retirement within the next five years.
- Difficulty recruiting new perfusionists, despite increasing demand for services.
- Workload intensity, with 80% of perfusionists working over 40 hours per week and nearly a quarter exceeding 50 hours.

The disparity in compensation between Canada and the United States is a notable factor in perfusionist migration. Higher wages, stronger incentive structures, and better administrative support in the U.S. continue to draw skilled professionals away, exacerbating the staffing crisis in Canadian hospitals. Without competitive remuneration and retention initiatives, this trend will persist.

Studies on healthcare burnout underscore the risks of excessive workloads, particularly in high-stakes environments like cardiac surgery (Shanafelt et al., 2019). Without intervention, these trends threaten patient safety and the sustainability of the profession.

Call Burdens, Compensation, and Cost of Living Challenges

Perfusionists in Canada bear a significant on-call workload, averaging 117.8 call hours per month, with some covering over 200 hours per month outside of their time in their work facility. However, 66% have not seen an increase in standby pay since entering the field, despite inflation and increasing workload expectations. Furthermore:

- 40% of respondents do not receive compensated recovery time after overnight callback shifts.



- Only four of twenty responding departments track overtime, with an average of 87.9 extra hours per FTE per year, some working exponentially beyond that number.
- 98% of perfusionists believe an increase in standby pay is necessary.

Another critical issue is the geographic reality of cardiac surgical centres being primarily located in larger, expensive cities. Given that perfusionists must live close to the hospital for timely response to emergency cases, the financial burden of urban living compounds the need for equitable on-call compensation. The acuity of perfusionist call responsibilities—where delays can lead to increased morbidity and mortality—justifies aligning standby pay with that of physician colleagues tasked with managing the same patients. This parity would reflect the vital role perfusionists play in patient survival and surgical success.

Industry standards in anesthesiology and critical care medicine suggest that prolonged work hours contribute to cognitive fatigue, increasing the risk of medical errors (Gaba & Howard, 2019). Improved standby compensation and formalized post-call rest policies are essential to mitigate these risks.

Administrative Leadership and Institutional Support

Survey data indicates that 54% of perfusionists feel unsupported by health authority leadership, and 35% of team leaders cite a lack of administrative leadership as a major challenge. Additionally, research participation is hampered by time, funding, and a lack of medical leadership engagement, which hampers the ability to participate in quality assurance and quality improvement projects to strengthen patient safety and critical care.

Many perfusionists also expressed frustration that their role is not well understood, even within surgical and critical care teams. While 65% feel respected by their colleagues, the remaining 35% cite a lack of appreciation from administrators and management. Many perfusionists emphasized that their expertise in maintaining patient safety during surgery is significantly underestimated.

Perfusionists consistently reported experiencing job-related sacrifices, with 63% indicating that they had at least four significant work-related impacts in the past week alone. The most common included:

- Skipping meals (59%)
- Changing personal or family plans due to work (42%)
- Arriving home late from work (38%)
- Experiencing disrupted sleep patterns
- Working through shifts without breaks

This degree of occupational stress is unsustainable and contributes to burnout, ultimately threatening retention in an already strained workforce.

Improving administrative leadership can yield significant benefits, including:

- Increased engagement in quality assurance and quality initiatives.



- Enhanced team morale and job satisfaction.
- Stronger advocacy for resources, including modern equipment and staffing increases.

A shift toward collaborative decision-making, as seen in high-functioning interdisciplinary teams, can help address these gaps (West et al., 2021).

Why Perfusionists Choose Their Profession

Despite the challenges, many perfusionists are deeply passionate about their careers. Survey respondents cited autonomy, responsibility in a critical care environment, and the challenge of keeping pace with evolving clinical work as key motivators for entering the field. Many were drawn to perfusion by their desire to play a pivotal role in life-saving procedures and to work at the forefront of surgical innovation.

When asked what advice they would give to those considering a career in perfusion, responses highlighted several key themes:

- Be prepared for long hours and a high-stress environment.
- Continuous learning is essential to remain competent in the field.
- On-call responsibilities are demanding and can impact personal life.
- Some respondents caution against entering the field without fully understanding its challenges.
- Finding a supportive team and prioritizing work-life balance is crucial.
- Maintaining personal health and resilience is necessary in a high-pressure work environment.
- The role is critical but often underrecognized—perfusionists must advocate for themselves.

These insights underscore both the rewards and demands of the profession and serve as guidance for future generations of perfusionists.

Balancing Workforce Expansion and Retention Strategies

As the demand for perfusionists rises, training programs must expand strategically. However, increasing training spots without addressing retention will only compound the problem by overburdening an already stressed professional community. A sustainable approach must prioritize:

- Retention-focused policies, such as improved compensation, work-life balance initiatives, and career progression opportunities.
- Structured mentorship programs to support new graduates without straining existing staff.
- Maintaining rigorous certification standards to uphold patient safety while ensuring an adequate pipeline of professionals.



As the perfusion workforce evolves, retention strategies must align with the changing values of the next generation of professionals. Studies indicate that younger professionals place a high emphasis on work-life balance, career growth, and organizational values when choosing long-term employment (Twenge, 2017). Unlike previous generations, salary alone is not the primary driver of job satisfaction—though competitive compensation remains crucial, professionals also seek:

- **Work-Life Integration** – With 80% of surveyed perfusionists working more than 40 hours per week and 24% exceeding 50 hours, achieving work-life balance is a pressing issue. Flexible scheduling, additional post-call recovery time, and mental health support could significantly impact retention.
- **Career Growth & Leadership Opportunities** – The survey showed that 32% of perfusionists plan to move beyond clinical roles, with ECLS leadership, transfusion management, and cardiac surgery first-assist roles being emerging opportunities. Organizations should create structured career pathways to support professional development.
- **Recognition & Purpose-Driven Work** – Gen Z professionals seek meaningful contributions to their field. The survey highlights that many perfusionists feel undervalued by administrative leadership. Improved recognition programs and stronger advocacy for the profession’s role in patient safety can enhance job satisfaction.
- **Education & Skill Development** – With 31% of perfusionists lacking employer support for continuing education, providing funding for advanced certifications and conference attendance could help retain young professionals eager to expand their expertise.

By addressing these non-monetary factors alongside financial incentives, healthcare institutions can better retain the next generation of perfusionists while maintaining high standards of patient care.

The Evolution and Future of Perfusion

Despite existing challenges, 67% of perfusionists see their role evolving in the next 5-10 years. Emerging responsibilities, such as expanding leadership roles in ECLS, advanced practice roles in cardiac surgery first assist, and transfusion management leadership, offer exciting opportunities for professional growth. However, 37% feel their scope of practice is being threatened, with 87% of this subset believing their concerns are not being addressed.

To protect and advance the profession, we recommend:

- Clear advocacy efforts within hospital administration to solidify professional scope.
- Expansion of continuing education support, currently lacking for 31% of perfusionists.
- Integration of perfusionists in leadership discussions on technology and innovation.



Conclusion: A Call to Action The Canadian Society of Clinical Perfusion recognizes the dedication and resilience of its members. While the survey data highlights serious challenges, it also reflects the passion and commitment of perfusionists across the country. Addressing staffing shortages, call burden inequities, and administrative leadership gaps will require coordinated efforts between professional organizations, health authorities, and policymakers.

By strengthening advocacy, improving working conditions, and fostering professional growth, we can ensure the longevity and success of clinical perfusion in Canada. This white paper serves as both an acknowledgment of the critical work performed by perfusionists and a blueprint for meaningful change.



References

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