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EXPERIENCES OF ASTRONAUT PHYSICIANS - WHY THE CAREER AND TRAINING OF A
MEDICAL DOCTOR ALSO PREPARES AND COMPLIMENTS THE CAREER OF AN ASTRONAUT

Abstract

Several medical doctors have gone on to become astronauts from around the world. NASA has had over 20 physicians with the first astronaut physician being selected in 1973 and even the first Black American female astronaut in space was also a physician. Canada has so far had 4 physician astronauts which include 3 family physicians and Canada's first female astronaut who was also the world's first neurologist in space. It is interesting to note that from the current 9 Canadians that have until now been into space 44

Other countries have also had accomplished astronauts who were physicians including Japan, Netherlands, Malaysia's first astronaut, etc.

We investigated characteristics of an astronaut's and physician's career that can be synergistic and that better prepares a physician for a career as an astronaut. We also highlight the parallels of the career of a physician and experiences such as a high stakes emergency scenario or working in rural and isolated conditions offer similar experiences of an astronaut mission.

Additionally, we looked into the aspects of astronaut training and how that too brings about a better understanding of leadership and followership which can enhance approach to medicine and global medical challenges such as the pandemic.

Our overall message highlights the similarities in physician training and practice with that of the training and career of astronauts. We also encourage physicians, healthcare professionals to educate and explore potential careers and opportunities in the space sector. Additionally, greater awareness about the benefits space can offer healthcare professionals, researchers, can greatly enhance utilizing innovative approaches to health and the environment.