ECHO for Clinical Research Professionals (CRP) – Session Summary of (i) Key presentation and (ii) Problem discussion from session held on 27 March 2026

(i) KEY PRESENTATION:

Sharing my Clinical Research Professional Internship Experience by Rebecca Dang

Rebecca Dang shared her journey into clinical research in an honest and practical way, focusing on how she identified gaps in her experience and actively worked to fill them.

With a background in life sciences and pathology, most of her early training was in basic science and lab work. When she moved into a research technician role, she realized she didn't have much formal clinical research experience and, like many, felt unsure about her place in that space. She described this as feeling like "I didn't really fit in," and recognized that she needed to be more intentional about building those skills. That reflection pushed her to start looking for opportunities like the CRP internship.

Her first internship in 2024 was at Mount Sinai in Toronto and focused on pregnancy and inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). The project looked at how maternal IBD affects breast milk and infant outcomes. This was a hybrid role, where she worked both in person and virtually. A big part of her role was recruiting participants, especially healthy controls, which the study was lacking. She also helped with data collection and analysis. Through this experience, she learned a lot about navigating different ethics processes across institutions and what actually works in recruitment. She shared that while there were many strategies such as working with prenatal clinics or advertising through programs. The most effective approach was simple: "when you have a team member who's in the waiting room and they're able to talk about the study," it makes a big difference. It also helped with retention because participants remembered the interaction and were more likely to stay engaged.

In 2025, she took on a second internship with the University of Alberta, this time fully virtual and focused on a different aspect of IBD, this time its link to colorectal cancer. Unlike her first internship, this one involved building a new study from scratch.

She worked on developing protocols, submitting ethics applications, creating a REDCap database, and helping launch the study. This experience came with new challenges, like managing time zone differences and working entirely remotely. She also spent a lot of time writing and refining standard operating procedures and learning new tools like R and SPSS.

Across both internships, Rebecca highlighted how much she grew, both technically and personally. She gained experience in data analysis, ethics submissions, coordination, and scientific communication, but she emphasized that the interpersonal side was just as important.

She talked about developing teamwork, collaboration, and time management skills, and said that one of the biggest outcomes for her was confidence. Coming from a basic science background, she said she eventually realized that "I could fit in with the clinical researchers, and it's an amazing feeling."

She also shared some concrete outcomes from these experiences, including presenting at national conferences, contributing to an international presentation, and co-authoring a paper. Still,

what stood out most to her was the network she built. She described how people she met during the internship later reached out to meet up at conferences, and how those relationships continued even after the internship ended. For her, that sense of community was one of the most valuable parts of the experience.

During the Q&A, Rebecca gave some very practical advice about how she actually secured these internships. She explained that she started by identifying her interests and then researching people in that field. From there, she sent cold emails. She admitted it can feel intimidating, but emphasized that it works: “cold emailing does work.” Her approach was structured—she made a shortlist, contacted a few people at a time, and followed up if needed. She also stressed the importance of being clear in those emails about what you want to learn and what the internship would look like. As she put it, “if you come telling them… what you kind of hope to gain, it gives them clarity on how they can support you.”

She also clarified that for the internship application, you do need to secure a supervisor and project ahead of time, since those are required components. Overall, her message was very consistent with the discussion during the “Open Discussion” part of the meeting: be proactive, be clear about your goals, and don’t be afraid to reach out. Her experience showed that even without a traditional clinical research background, it’s possible to build your way in with the right combination of initiative, persistence, and openness to learning.

(ii) OPEN DISCUSSION

The Open Discussion part of the meeting focused on this question: how someone in an administrative healthcare role, specifically as a patient flow coordinator, can transition into a clinical research career. Questions for discussion included: what strategies to use when making the transition, what transferable skills would be valuable, and what the current job market and challenges look like. This question is a commonly experienced one among those trying to break into clinical research without direct experience, especially in a competitive environment.

ECHO members discussed the problem, and focused on the following areas:

The discussion that followed emphasized that there is no single path into clinical research, but several practical strategies can help. Many participants highlighted the value of completing formal training or certificate programs in clinical research, such as postgraduate diplomas or online certifications. These programs help build foundational knowledge and signal genuine interest to employers. Others pointed out that gaining hands-on experience e.g. through internships, volunteering, or internal opportunities within one’s current workplace, is often key to getting a foot in the door. Several speakers shared personal experiences of volunteering for months or even a year before securing paid roles, emphasizing persistence and willingness to start in entry-level positions.

A strong theme throughout the discussion was the importance of transferable skills. Participants noted that the problem presenter already has valuable experience from his patient-facing role, including communication, coordination, and teamwork. These skills are highly relevant in clinical research, particularly in roles involving patient interaction, recruitment, and study coordination. Additional skills that were repeatedly mentioned included empathy, organization, time management, and the ability to handle competing priorities. Some also emphasized gaining technical skills over time, such as working with databases, data analysis tools, or clinical systems, even if initially self-taught.

Networking and mentorship were also highlighted as enabling factors. Participants encouraged reaching out to people already working in clinical research, asking for advice, and building relationships. Informal approaches like “coffee chats” or mentorship conversations were described as helpful ways to learn about the field and uncover opportunities. Professional organizations and communities were also recommended as ways to stay connected and informed. Several speakers stressed that asking for advice is often the first step in building meaningful professional connections.

The discussion also addressed the realities of the job market. Many agreed that clinical research is competitive, especially for entry-level roles, and that it may take numerous applications before getting an interview. One speaker mentioned applying to dozens of positions before receiving a response. Because of this, persistence and resilience were emphasized as essential. At the same time, participants expressed that most roles can be learned on the job if given the opportunity, and that confidence and the ability to “sell yourself” in interviews can make a significant difference.

Overall, the group’s advice centered on being proactive and strategic: pursue relevant training, gain any form of practical experience available, highlight transferable skills, and actively build a network. While the path may not be straightforward, the discussion made it clear that transitioning into clinical research is achievable with persistence, continuous learning, and a willingness to start wherever opportunities arise.

RESOURCES shared by members:

SUMMER JOB OPPORTUNITY
Thank you, Heather DiFruscia, for sharing about this job opportunity:

LinkedIn Post: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/micyrn_canadasummerjobs-canadasummerjobs-studentjobs-activity-7450954751225225216-JyUs?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAAArprDkBSG0dmRWIG2obBtqnHJR_nd2p3KU

Direct Website Link: Canada Summer Jobs — MICYRN

She says, of note, there is an age range (15-30) tied to the requirements of the overall program funding (Canada Summer Jobs Program - more info here.

CANTRAIN (the Canadian Consortium of Clinical Trial Training Platform)
This came up as a key Canadian resource offering structured, competency-based training for people involved in clinical trials. It includes foundational courses, short microlearning modules, and different learning streams depending on your role (e.g. coordinators, investigators, or trainees). The idea is to build practical, real-world skills and support career progression in clinical research. https://wecantrain.ca/home/clinical-trial-training-programs/

Good Clinical Practice (GCP) training.
Considered a baseline requirement for anyone involved in clinical trials. GCP training focuses on ethics, safety, and data integrity, and is often required to be refreshed periodically. Courses are available from https://michener.ca/programs-courses/good-clinical-practice-101-a-refresher/ and https://apps.senecapolytechnic.ca/ssos/find/CRP113/current/ce

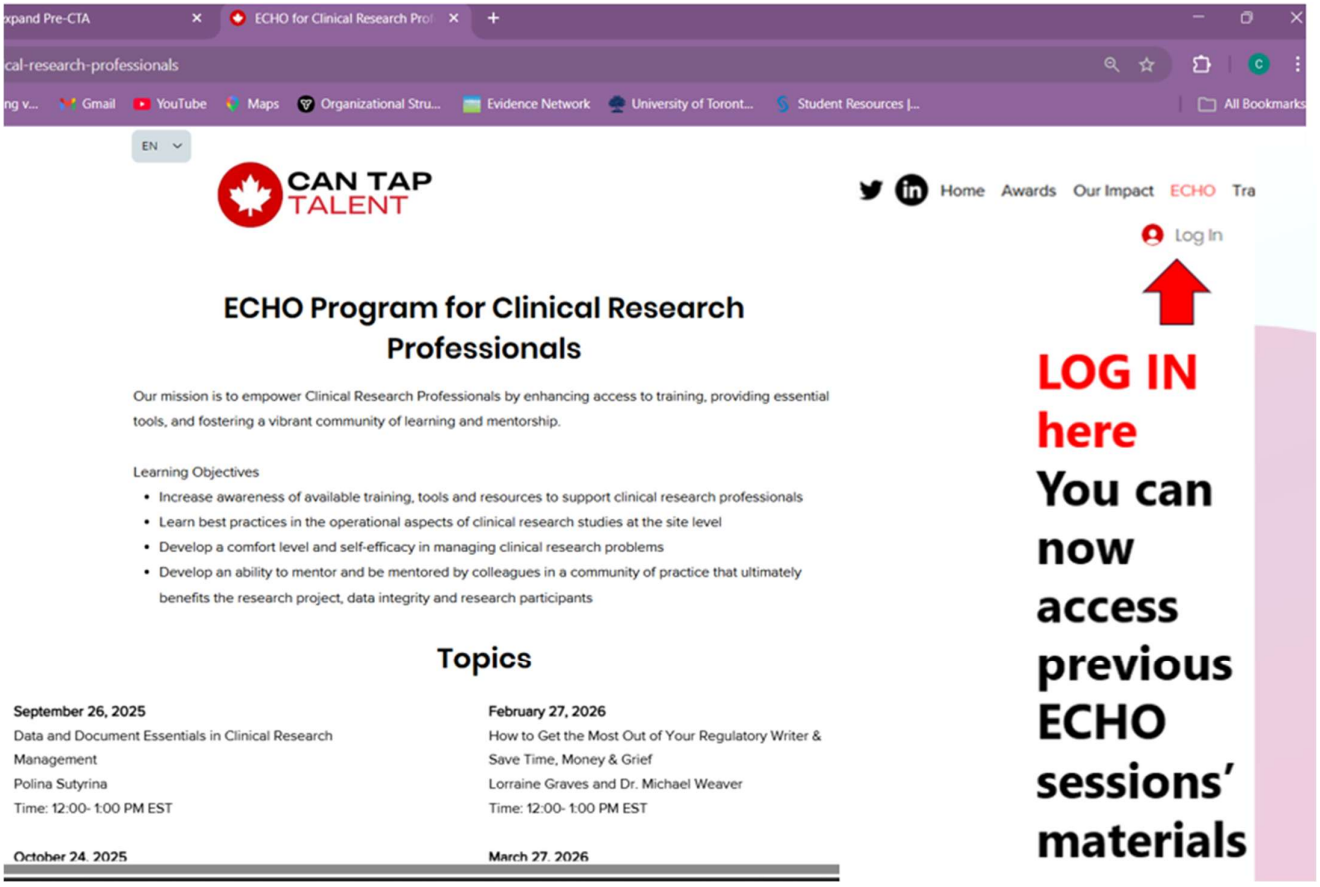
NEW

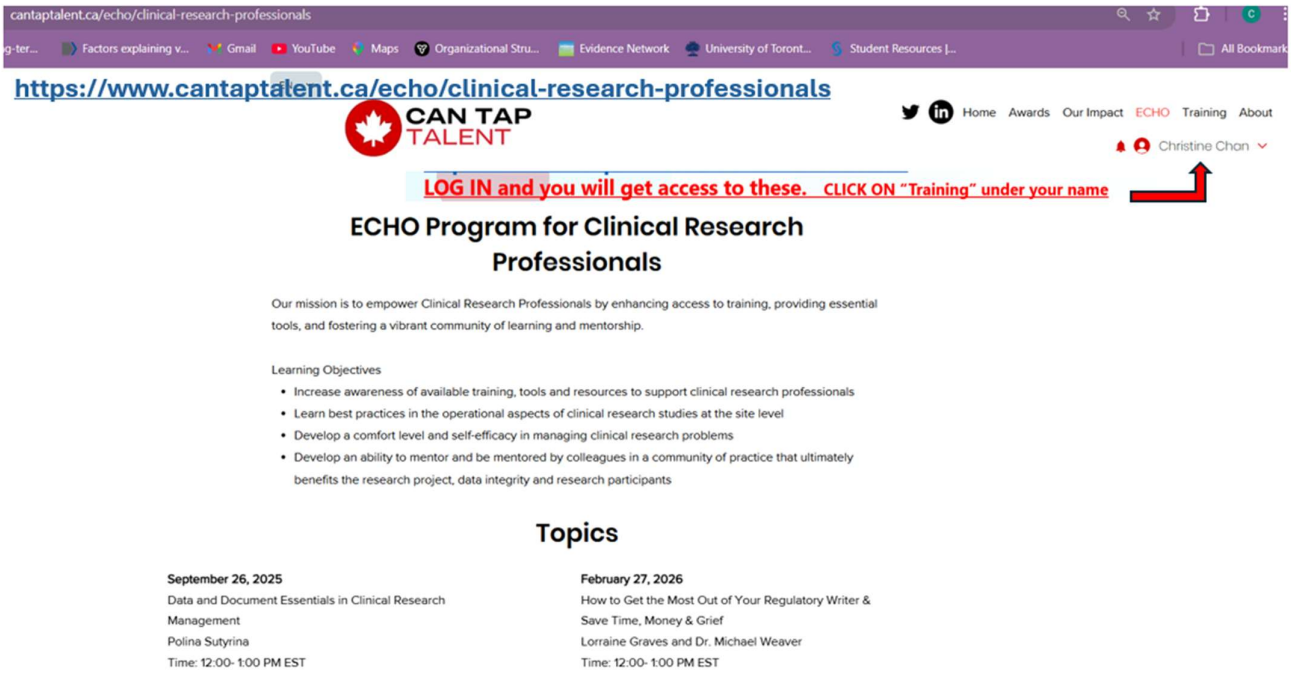
A repository of resources from previous ECHO sessions is now available on our website:

Go to https://www.cantaptalent.ca/echo/clinical-research-professionals

And click on LOG IN to register for the first time, then re-enter the website, and click "TRAINING" under your name, to see the resources.

See screenshots below and on the following page.





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ECHO Program for Clinical Research Professionals
https://www.cantaptalent.ca/echo/clinical-research-professionals