



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Future Physicians call upon Government of Canada to Improve Access to Health Human Resources

OTTAWA, Feb. 4, 2013 – The Canadian Federation of Medical Students (CFMS) is bringing tomorrow's physicians to Parliament Hill for its annual Lobby Day. Medical students from Vancouver to St. John's will meet with Members of Parliament and Senators to discuss strategies to ensure that all Canadians have access to health care wherever they live.

The CFMS believes that all Canadians – regardless of location – deserve adequate, quality care. According to 2004 Health Canada data, the doctor-to-population ratio in rural Canada will grow to over 1:1,800 by the turn of the next decade. This is compared to a ratio of about 1:500 for Canada as a whole.

Moreover, the federal government does not currently have a system to predict how the number and type of physicians that will be required in the future to serve the diverse needs of Canadians. As such, provinces and regions continue to struggle with the appropriate distribution of physician location and specialty, especially in rural and remote areas.

The CFMS applauds the federal government for announcing that it will forgive a portion of Canada Student Loans for new family physicians working in rural and remote communities. However, the value of this incentive is limited by the fact that medical graduates must make payments on both the principal and interest of their loan during their residency training. Many residents pay off large portions of their loans before they are eligible for loan

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forgiveness. Furthermore, it makes economic sense for residents to transfer the entirety of their Student Loans to private bank loans with lower interest rates, making them ineligible for the federal program. The CFMS is requesting that the government defer repayment of Canada Student Loans until the completion of residency training, so that new physicians may take advantage of the government's loan forgiveness incentive.

The CFMS is also calling upon the federal government to create needs-based physician projections. Currently the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI, a national organization linking federal, provincial and local health data) tracks physician numbers, retirement, and inter-provincial migration; however, this data is only ever available retrospectively.

Governments need to be able to make healthcare decisions that anticipate and prepare for changes in the population; therefore, projections of future physician needs are warranted. The federal government and CIHI are ideally suited to coordinate these projections.

QUOTES FROM THE CFMS PRESIDENT AND VP ADVOCACY

"For medical students, the concept of health human resources is inseparably linked to career decision making," says Robin Clouston, President of the Canadian Federation of Medical Students (CFMS).

CFMS Vice-President of Advocacy Tom McLaughlin says, "It doesn't make sense to make decisions about the future of our health system with data from the past. Governments need projections of how many physicians, in what specialties, and in what locations, will be required in the future to best serve the changing population." He further states, "Right now, even though 20% of Canadians live in rural or remote areas, only 10% of physicians work rurally. At the same time, last year one in five doctors about to graduate from training said they were still looking for a job in their specialty. 50% of newly-trained surgeons thought their job prospects were poor. Clearly, something about the way our nation determines its doctor supply is not working. We need a national response to this national issue."

The Canadian Federation of Medical Students (CFMS) is a national organization that represents over 7500 medical students at 14 medical schools across Canada.

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