



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

In response to Dalhousie Medicine's decision to sell ten medical school seats to Saudi Arabia

March 17 2011 – As the national representative body of medical students in Canada, the Canadian Federation of Medical Students (CFMS) is greatly concerned regarding Dalhousie University's recent decision to sell ten undergraduate medical seats to Saudi Arabia.

As it stands, there is limited capacity within our medical schools to appropriately train Canadian physicians. Increasing the number of students enrolled in over-saturated teaching centres may exacerbate this problem and pose a threat to the quality of education provided. Adequate clinical exposure is of paramount importance in medical education; it is by working with physicians and being exposed to patients that students learn required clinical skills and procedures. Increasing the number of medical students enrolled in a program results in fewer of these opportunities and creates competition among medical students for clinical electives and rotations. Given that the system is strained in terms of capacity, the CFMS is opposed to any increases in the number of medical trainees without appropriate investment in their training or tangible benefits to the Canadian healthcare system.

Through distributed medical education (DME) sites, such as the new Dalhousie site in New Brunswick, capacity is being built within the system. The CFMS applauds such initiatives and strongly believes in the benefits of DME. However, such additional capacity could be better utilized to serve the needs of the Canadian population. At a time when Canada is facing physician shortages, it is imprudent to use our resources, including health human resources, to train physicians who will not contribute to Canada's healthcare system. Increasing numbers of capable Canadians are leaving Canada to

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attend medical school abroad due to the lack of capacity within our system to train them. As such, it seems counterintuitive to train international students who will most likely return to their country of origin upon completion of their training when we know that Canadians with the potential of contributing to our physician workforce are leaving the country due to a lack of capacity.

The CFMS proposes that any capacity that has been built into the medical education system ought to be used to address the physician shortage in Canada. Rural communities are facing the most severe physician shortages and it has been demonstrated that medical students originating from rural areas are more likely to return to their community of origin to practice. Thus, the Canadian population would be better served if additional medical school seats were made available to students from rural areas. By adopting such practices, medical schools, in concert with government, would demonstrate that they recognize their role within the healthcare system and are willing to make a difference.

Canada's publicly funded medical schools exist to ensure that our country's physician workforce adequately responds to the population's needs. How does selling seats to other countries in order to train their physician workforce help us fulfil that mandate? And, more importantly, what is the cost to Canada?

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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