



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Is the High Cost of Medical School Bad for the Health of Canadians?

OTTAWA, May 25 - The high cost of medical education in Canada may have a negative impact on medical student diversity and the health of Canadians, according to an article to be published by the journal Medical Education on May 25, 2010.

"Medical student diversity is very important for health human resources planning and for the Canadian health care system in general" explained Dr. Tyler Johnston, president of the Canadian Federation of Medical Students (CFMS). "Increasing medical student diversity may actually increase physician accessibility in underserved areas. We know that medical students from rural areas are more likely to practice in rural communities and medical students from low-income families are more likely to serve low-income patients. These are areas where we need physicians."

New research led by medical student Dr. Shaheed Merani of the University of Alberta, and supported by faculty members at St. Michael's Hospital and the University of Toronto, has revealed that most medical students come from wealthy families. Additionally, few medical students come from rural areas and the ethnic diversity of the Canadian population is not appropriately represented in medical school classes.

These findings come at a time when tuition fees at many medical schools in Canada continue to rise, approaching \$20,000 per year at some schools.

A Canadian first, researchers also focused on comparing medical students in Quebec with medical students in other provinces. "Since the early 1990s,

**Canadian Federation of Medical Students
Fédération des étudiants et des étudiantes en médecine du Canada**

324 Somerset Street West, Suite 300
Ottawa, ON K2P 0J9 Canada
Tel: 613-565-7740 Fax: 613-288-0524
E-mail: office@cfms.org
Web: www.cfms.org

medical school tuition fees have increased substantially in all regions of Canada except Quebec," said Dr. Merani. "This provided a natural opportunity to examine the effect of tuition fee increases on medical student demographics, indebtedness and financial stress."

Inside Quebec, where tuition fees were typically under \$4,000 per year, median debt-load upon graduation was \$30,000. The researchers found that students in Quebec were more likely to come from low-income families, had less debt at the time of graduation, and were less likely to be suffering from stress induced by their financial situation. Outside Quebec, the average debt at the time of medical school graduation was \$90,000.

"Canadians should be concerned that medical students are often graduating with six-figure debts," adds Dr. Johnston "Students who graduate with large debts may be less likely to pursue research careers or practice in specialties like family medicine or geriatrics."

"Governments and universities are under considerable financial pressure, but allowing tuition fees to influence the make-up of medical schools classes is unfair to prospective students and will likely have a significant negative impact on the health of Canadians", concludes Dr. Johnston. "We need to do more to identify talented students from under-represented backgrounds and ensure that these students are given the support they need to apply to and get through medical school."

The Canadian Federation of Medical Students is a student-led national organization that represents over 7,000 medical students at 14 medical schools across Canada. For more information on the organization, visit www.cfms.org.

For a copy of the study, please contact Ijab Khanafer at the information below.

For further information: CFMS Media Contact: Ijab Khanafer, Vice-President of Communications, Canadian Federation of Medical Students, Phone: (613) 698-9664, E-mail: vpcommunications@cfms.org; Lead Author: Dr. Shaheed Merani, University of Alberta, Phone: (780) 993-4761, E-mail: merani@ualberta.ca; Faculty Author: Dr. Irfan Dhalla, St. Michael's Hospital, Phone: (416) 864-6060 x7113, E-mail: dhallai@smh.ca

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