

## **PROGRAM PROPOSAL - SUMMARY FOR FACULTY COUNCIL:**

### **BScPA - Bachelor of Science Physician Assistant Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto**

**March 2009**

This is a proposal for a Bachelor of Science Physician Assistant degree (BScPA) as a full-time professional, second-entry undergraduate degree program to be based in the Department of Family and Community Medicine (DFCM) in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Toronto (U of T). The BScPA will be a University of Toronto degree that will be delivered in collaboration with Northern Ontario School of Medicine (NOSM) and The Michener Institute for Applied Health Sciences (Michener), which are both distinguished, healthcare-focused, educational institutions. The three institutions will contribute in the development, administration and delivery of the U of T education program. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been developed to this effect.

#### **PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

The BScPA program will offer students a balance in academic and clinical orientation, extensive access to healthcare relevant resources and a curriculum delivery model that maximizes rural training and geographic accessibility throughout Ontario. The aim of the program is to equip graduates with the competencies necessary to establish the foundation for a sustainable Canadian Physician Assistant profession based on principles of:

1. Social accountability (including increasing access to healthcare in underserved and rural communities)
2. Professionalism (including establishing the identity of PAs in a variety of healthcare settings, particularly in primary care)
3. Interprofessional Collaboration (including collaborative patient-centred practice)
4. Critical thinking and Life-long learning (including enhancing the effectiveness of services provided by physicians)

The full-time distance and distributed learning program will require the completion of 6 consecutive semesters over 24 months. Expected total enrollment the first year will be 22 students with an anticipated increase to a maximum of 42 students per cohort by the second intake year. This novel program will likely attract a diverse group of candidates from across the country. The BScPA is intended for professionals with prior experience in a health related field and with commitment to contributing to healthcare in underserved and rural communities.

#### **PA OVERVIEW**

A Physician Assistant (PA) is a mid-level health care professional who is considered to be a physician extender. PAs are authorized through Delegation of Controlled Acts and other procedures to provide a broad range of medical and surgical services under the supervision of licensed physicians. A Certified PA is a graduate of an accredited PA education program and has passed the National Competency Exam.

The Ministry of Health and Long Term Care's (MOHLTC) 2006 Health Human Resources plan called for the introduction of Physician Assistants into the Ontario healthcare system to contribute to decreased wait times and improved access to primary care. HealthForce Ontario Pilot and Demonstration projects began

in 2007 with PAs in various clinical positions in Ontario. In September 2008, the University of Manitoba began a Masters-level PA program and McMaster University began a BScPA program.

## FUNDING

The program will make use of existing resources within the Faculty of Medicine, such as the Anatomy Lab, simulation centres, simulated patients, library and online learning resources. Inherent in the benefit of collaboration with the three institutions is the ability to share resources. Educational resources such as simulation equipment and lab space, education software and existing course materials and advanced communication technologies (e.g. videoconferencing) are available for contribution to the program by NOSM and Michener.

Each institution has a variety of resources already in place to aid students in finding housing for the residential and clinical practicum portions of the program. The Medical and Program Director, along with the Academic and Clinical Coordinators, will work with students and the institutions to facilitate access to housing.

The MOHLTC has committed one-time start-up funding to support this, in addition to support for clinical placement costs. The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) has agreed the funding model will match that provided to the other PA program in the province (3 BIUs per 1.5 FTE). The tuition rate has also been agreed upon by MTCU to align this program with the other provincial PA program. In 2010, the tuition fee for a student in Year 1 of the Physician Assistant Professional Degree Program is expected to be \$9650 for 12 months/3 semesters. Students will be responsible for transportation costs for the longitudinal clinical experiences in Year 1 and all travel and accommodation costs related to the 7 residential components throughout both years of the program. Bursary program support may be available through the University to students who are Canadian citizens based on demonstrated financial need. Bursaries are intended to offset provincial financial assistance and cannot supplement the full cost of education.

## APPROPRIATENESS

The Faculty of Medicine is directed by various aspects of the changing landscape, which includes the “Changing Dynamic for Knowledge and Education”<sup>1</sup>. The embrace of new technologies to support and deliver innovative curriculum, including web-based, complex audio-visual and simulations is in keeping with the PA program proposal which is designed to align with the modern technologies of the generation.

The BScPA program aligns with a major objective of the Faculty of Medicine Academic Plan 2004-2010 to “advance our scientific and professional training platform for the 21st century. The Faculty will: a) strategically *leverage newly created programs...* and new collaborative programs; b) *capitalize on* national attention and capacity-building needs of areas such as Public Health and bioinformatics and our expanding role in global health; and c) *exploit emerging competencies* in knowledge translation, innovative simulation tools, and inter-professional education, to name a few. We shall prioritize the programs that will best prepare future leaders in research and education, consistent with the Faculty’s vision statement<sup>1</sup>.”

This program is in complement to U of T’s Undergraduate Medical Education priority strategy of promoting generalism and primary care as a career path for trainees, as a socially accountable strategy of

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<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Medicine Academic Plan <http://www.facmed.utoronto.ca/Assets/about/2010plan.pdf?method=1>  
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contributing to a sustainable healthcare system<sup>2</sup>. Through clinical placements focusing on primary care and generalist medicine, students will be able to address specific learning needs and areas of interest using a competency –based academic curriculum to demonstrate their proficiencies as a PA.

DFCM has agreed to house the PA program with recognition that the majority of the current Family Medicine Teaching Units are at full capacity and will have the right to decline to participate in offering clinical placements to PA students.

External stakeholder consultations have been ongoing with the Canadian Medical Association (CMA), the Canadian Association of Physician Assistants (CAPA), PA Educators in the US and in Canada, including those at McMaster and the University of Manitoba, individual PA Program Directors and the Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA). Consultations with positive comments of support have been received from within the Faculty of Medicine and beyond and include the following: Discovery Commons, Division of Anatomy, Department of Physiology, Lawrence S. Bloomberg Faculty of Nursing, UTS Paramedicine Joint Program with Centennial College and the Network of Excellence in Simulation for Clinical Teaching & Learning. Pending discussions are forthcoming with the Hospital University Education Committee (HUEC) and TAHSN (Toronto Academic Health Sciences Network), as well as at the Council of Health Science Deans.

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<sup>2</sup> University of Toronto, 2005. *Generalism Task Force Report*, Undergraduate Medical Education Program. Executive Summary for Faculty Council– BscPA - March 6 2009  
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