



TO: Committee on Academic Policy and Programs

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AGENDA ITEM: 5

### **ITEM IDENTIFICATION**

**Faculty of Medicine: Proposal for Bachelor of Science Physician Assistant (BScPA) degree**

### **JURISDICTIONAL INFORMATION:**

The Committee has authority to recommend to Academic Board for approval changes which establish a new degree program.

### **PREVIOUS ACTION TAKEN:**

### **HIGHLIGHTS:**

The Faculty of Medicine proposes the establishment of a Bachelor of Science Physician Assistant degree (BScPA) as a full-time professional, second-entry undergraduate degree program, as outlined in the attached proposal. The BScPA will be a University of Toronto degree that will be delivered with the participation of two distinguished, healthcare-focused, educational institutions: Northern Ontario School of Medicine (NOSM) and The Michener Institute for Applied Health Sciences (Michener). The program will be based in the Department of Family and Community Medicine.

A Physician Assistant (PA) is a mid-level health care professional who work as physician extenders. 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. Ontario's 2006 Health Human Resources strategy announced a plan to introduce PAs in the health care system. As part of introducing the PA initiative, a collaborative steering committee was established co-led by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) and the Ontario Medical Association (OMA). The committee represented employers (Ontario Hospital Association, Association of Ontario Health Centres, OMA); educators; regulators and professions such as medicine (College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario) and nursing (College of Nurses, Nurse Practitioners' Association of Ontario); the Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs); and government.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Introducing Physician Assistants in Ontario*, HealthForce Ontario, December 2008

In Canada, the University of Manitoba offers a Master's-level PA program and McMaster University began a BHScPA program in 2008. As outlined in the proposal, the BScPA program will offer students a balance in academic and clinical education, extensive access to healthcare-relevant resources and a curriculum delivery model that maximizes rural training and geographic accessibility throughout Ontario.

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. The BScPA is intended for professionals with prior experience in a health-related field and with commitment to contributing to healthcare in under-served and rural communities.

The Faculty and the Michener Institute have jointly offered a BSc (Medical Radiation Sciences) for the past decade. Building on their existing strong relationship, the Faculty of Medicine and the Michener began to explore the development of a new program in Physician Assistant education along with Northern Ontario School of Medicine. Unlike the BSc (Medical Radiation Sciences), the proposed BScPA is solely a UofT degree, rather than a joint degree, although the three institutions will contribute to the development, administration and delivery of the U of T education program. A formal MOU has been developed which outlines the principles of the academic relationship between the three institutions. The three institutions will be jointly responsible for assuring that the degree program meets the appropriate professional accreditation standards.

Consultations on the new degree have been undertaken with the University of Toronto Council of Health Science Deans, Lawrence S. Bloomberg Faculty of Nursing and the University of Toronto Scarborough Paramedicine program as well as external stakeholders. In the course of consultations, the question of how the scope practice of PAs differed from that of Nurse Practitioners was raised since the Lawrence S. Bloomberg Faculty of Nursing currently offers Nurse Practitioners programs. Nurse Practitioners are independently licensed practitioners with a defined, regulated scope of practice. PAs are not autonomous health care providers, and are currently not regulated in Ontario. PAs act under delegation of a supervising physician. The scope of practice for a PA is directly related to and limited by the scope of practice of their supervising physician.

Nurse Practitioner programs at Uof T are graduate degree and post-graduate diploma programs, while the PA program will be a second-entry undergraduate program. Inherent in this degree level difference is the admissions requirements, both academic and clinical. The academic requirements for the Nursing graduate degree (MN, NP, or MN/MHSc) programs include the completion of an undergraduate nursing degree. Although the PA program requires candidates to have experience as a health care provider, it is not limited to nursing. Both professional degree programs require pre-requisite clinical experience, although the parameters for this also differs – the NP program requires a minimum of two years of clinical nursing experience and the PA program will require only one year of direct patient contact in a health care capacity.

The BScPA degree proposal and relevant MOU were approved by the Faculty of Medicine Faculty Council on March 9, 2009. In accordance with governance procedures at the two institutions, the MOU has been approved by the Michener Institute President, office of the Chief Executive Officer and the Executive Leadership Team and by the Dean of Northern Ontario School of Medicine.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no resource implications for the University's operating budget as the BScPA program will be self-sustaining. The financial plan has been reviewed and approved by the Faculty of Medicine and by the Vice-Provost Planning and Budget Office. The BScPA degree proposal and MOU will be brought forward to the Planning and Budget Committee on May 7, 2009.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Committee on Academic Policy and Programs recommends to the Academic Board:

THAT the Bachelor of Science Physician Assistant (BScPA) degree at the Faculty of Medicine Department of Family and Community Medicine be recommended to Governing Council for approval, with enrolment commencing January, 2010.