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## Pharmacy Students United for Quebec Colleagues

Across the country, the landscape of pharmacy is changing. Financial pressures from governments compounded with difficult economic times, has forced many pharmacies to re-evaluate their current models. This rings most true with our pharmacist, and pharmacy student, colleagues in Quebec. Recent changes to provincial funding have cut revenue streams substantially for community pharmacy practice. Displeased by seemingly unilateral policies, many pharmacies have relinquished commitments to take on pharmacy students for experiential education rotations. Consequently, many Quebec pharmacy students have been caught in the crossfire and are struggling to find preceptors for required rotations. This is most alarming for the nearly 400 students from the Université de Montreal and Université Laval who may be forced to delay graduation this year should they not be able to complete the required structured practice hours. In all, nearly 1500 students risk delayed placements and graduation over the course of their 4 years of pharmacy school.

To many, the current changes in provincial legislature are bittersweet. Fortunately, these changes have provided Quebec pharmacists with an expanded scope of practice. This is good news for health care accessibility and patient outcomes. However, many of these expanded services lack adequate funding from public or private parties, thereby leaving many pharmacies with the tough decision of focusing on revenue generating dispensing fees or professionally fulfilling expanded services. Until recently, many pharmacies in Quebec relied heavily on dispensing fees, drug mark-ups and medication organization services. However, recent legislature has significantly reduced the amount of available reimbursements for Quebec pharmacies, resulting in multi-million-dollar savings for the province. Furthermore, to increase drug pricing transparency and further drive down pharmacy mark-ups, the province of Quebec has imposed a more stringent and detailed breakdown of pharmacy fees to patients and insurance companies. At first glance, these changes seem positive as they provide cheaper access to medication for patients and a decreased financial burden on the province. Unfortunately, many Quebec pharmacies are now struggling to compensate for these lost revenue streams while still maintaining the same standards of patient care.

Amongst these changes and daily practice obligations, many pharmacists still dedicate time and effort to training pharmacy students. However, frustrated and stretched thin, many Quebec pharmacies have withdrawn from this commitment and will no longer be mentoring students. The training of pharmacy students is yet another unpaid service that pharmacists undertake regularly. Nevertheless, it must be stated that there is tremendous value to both pharmacy students and pharmacists from the student-preceptor relationship. Pharmacy students are actively involved in services ranging from dispensing medications, to counseling, to communication with doctors and completing health assessments, just to name a few. Often, pharmacy students completing these additional services conduct them as learning opportunities for themselves and to further improve patient care; all the while providing extra support in the pharmacy setting as thriving health care providers. Even though training



of pharmacy students is an unpaid time commitment, pharmacies have much to gain from the relationship between current and future pharmacists. This is especially true amidst financial strains currently experienced by Quebec pharmacies.

That being said, pharmacy students are part of the solution. In Quebec alone, pharmacy students dedicate over 350 000 unpaid hours of work a year. Countless drug related problems, patient counseling encounters, and over the counter product recommendations, are facilitated by pharmacy students. Although some pharmacy students may lack experience, they make up for it with their current evidence-base knowledge. Where pharmacies may be struggling to make ends meet, pharmacy students are an inexpensive, sustainable and profitable time investment that is assured to positively perpetuate our profession and directly impact patient-care.

Although Quebec pharmacy students are concerned about their education, many are even more anxious about the future of pharmacy. With sparse funding for expanded services, many students are weary about entering a work environment primarily focused on the traditional dispensing model. Ultimately, fee reductions only promote healthcare accessibility to patients. However, this must be balanced with quality and sustainability of our practices. The millions of healthcare dollars saved through these provincial cuts are not being reinvested adequately into the profession. Therefore, the incentive to perform new cognitive services is absent, and consequently their implementation has stagnated in many pharmacies.

Pharmacy students are indisputably an essential part of pharmacy practice. It is unfortunate that amidst the dispute between the province and pharmacists, pharmacy students are not considered part of the solution and instead find their education jeopardized. Investment in pharmacy students' experiential education will assuredly provide pharmacy practice with both short-term and long-term benefits despite current challenges. During this trying time, Canada's current and future pharmacists must stand united and collaborate to achieve common goals of accessible, optimal and sustainable patient care. The Canadian Association of Pharmacy Students and Interns, and the leaders of the ten Canadian pharmacy student organizations stand united with our Quebec colleagues in the betterment of Quebec pharmacy practice focused on sustainability without compromising current student education.

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