



February 28, 2015

Canada Student Loan
Policy Department
FAX: 1-877-615-4244

Dear Marc LeBrun,

I am writing on behalf of the Canadian Association of Pharmacy Students and Interns (CAPSI) in support of the request submitted by the Association of Faculties of Pharmacy of Canada (AFPC), to permit recent pharmacist graduates (licensed pharmacists and pharmacists completing an approved residency) to be included in the Canada Student Loan forgiveness initiative.¹

Across Canada, there are multiple designated rural and remote communities that are in need of adequate access to primary health care. As it stands, the Canada Student Loan forgiveness program applies solely to family doctors and nurses. Pharmacists, however, have become a vital component of primary health care, particularly with our evolving expanded scope of practice that meets the increasing needs of patients.² Moreover, Canada's leading provider of research on public opinion – Ipsos Reid – ranked pharmacists as the country's most trusted health care profession.³ The skill sets and persona of pharmacists show a promising future of how this profession can help tackle the health care needs of our country's remote communities.

Primary Health Care Providers

Pharmacists are primary health care providers involved in core dispensing services, enhanced medication-related services and enhanced patient care services.⁴ Pharmacists continue to be the leading experts in medication management through assessing therapeutic appropriateness of prescription and non-prescription medications. Through our expanded scope of practice, pharmacists in most provinces can adapt/renew/refill prescriptions as needed, as well as provide pharmaceutical opinions and perform medication reviews.⁴ As legislation continues to adapt with our evolving profession, a number of pharmacists can now manage treatment of minor ailments, prescribe for smoking cessation, administer injections and implement and follow-up on care plans.⁴ Since pharmacists are equipped with these abilities, their role as primary care providers has optimized therapeutic outcomes for patients.⁴ Recruitment of these skilled health providers would be an asset to rural communities where there tends to be limited access to health care.

For provincial/territorial specific duties of pharmacist, please see²:
<http://www.pharmacists.ca/index.cfm/pharmacy-in-canada/scope-of-practice-canada/>



Rural and Remote Communities

Randomized clinical trials have suggested favourable disease-specific outcomes with the involvement of pharmacists as primary care providers; such diseases include hypertension, heart failure, asthma and diabetes management.⁵ Pharmacists are known to be the most accessible health care provider; therefore, they are well placed to provide an array of clinical services that are cost effective based on their accessibility to the public.⁵ Similar to urban communities, the rural communities of Canada would significantly benefit from an adequate supply of pharmacists. Equitable access to health care is a key principle of the Canadian healthcare system; therefore, the disparities noted in rural populations in terms of chronic disease management and timely services is a gap that pharmacists can fill.⁵

As it stands, the recruitment of pharmacists in rural and northern communities remains low.⁶ Some northern regions have as few as 42 pharmacists per 100,000 residents. In comparison, Canada's national average is 102 pharmacists per 100,000 residents; therefore, rural communities would benefit from having more pharmacists to serve their population.⁶ A Canadian study on patient perspectives in rural communities concluded that 80% of participants expressed a lack of continuity in care and inefficient health care delivery based on their geographical location.⁷ With pharmacy schools across the country in the planning and implementation stages of the Entry-Level PharmD (ELPD) program and continuing education programs, licensed pharmacists are now better equipped with the knowledge and clinical skills to optimize patient care.⁸

Moving Forward

Pharmacists have a profound appreciation for the health care concerns present in remote communities. In fact, all pharmacy institutions in Canada encompass rural experiential placements in their curriculum.⁶ The issue lies in the lack of incentive for pharmacists to relocate to a rural setting to establish their careers. Offering the Canada Student Loan forgiveness program to licensed pharmacists and those completing a pharmacy residency would be an excellent incentive for the recruitment of pharmacists to designated rural and remote communities. Both family doctors and nurses are crucial members of the primary health care team; however, the responsibilities and skill set of pharmacists can bridge the gap in continuity between clinical assessment and therapeutic management.

The inclusion of pharmacists in loan forgiveness programs have been implemented successfully in other countries in hopes of recruiting more pharmacists to underserved regions. For example, in the United States the National Health Services Corps (NHSC) has State Loan Repayment Programs (SLRP) to support working pharmacists in rural communities.⁹ A sample of the potential benefit pharmacists can bring to communities can be showcased through a pharmacist-managed immunization campaign in a rural setting that found a 54% increase in influenza vaccination rates, with particular benefit noted in high-risk patients.¹⁰ Moreover, a recent AFPC survey found that 30% of new graduates are willing to start their career as pharmacists in rural communities.¹ With this potential resource of pharmacists along with a market of approximately



36,000 licensed pharmacists across our country, the expansion of the Canada Student Loan forgiveness initiative to include pharmacists would aid in the recruitment of these health care professionals to remote communities.¹

CAPSI recognizes the pending need for primary health care providers, such as pharmacists, in rural and remote communities. We have noted that both British Columbia and Alberta have established the B.C. loan forgiveness program and the Northern Alberta Development Council bursary program respectively.^{11, 12} Pharmacists are eligible for these provincial programs, which encompass similar goals and incentives as the Canada Student Loan forgiveness program. We ask for this level of opportunity to be provided on a national level for all licensed pharmacists and pharmacy residents across the country. The Canada Student Loan forgiveness initiative is a well established program that can optimize recruitment and possibly lead to retention of these health care providers in underserved areas.

I look forward to future correspondences regarding this request. Please feel free to contact me via email at preselect@capsi.ca.

Thank you for your time.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kavetha Selvathilagan'.

Kavetha Selvathilagan

National President-elect, Canadian Association of Pharmacy Students and Interns (CAPSI)



References:

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