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**BRIEFING NOTE: GRADUATES OF FOREIGN MEDICAL SCHOOLS (GOFMS)  
TRAINING PROGRAM AT ST. PAUL'S HOSPITAL,  
VANCOUVER**

**BACKGROUND:**

In Canada, graduates of foreign medical schools who are permanent residents or citizens have great difficulty in obtaining internship training in Canadian programs. There are number of reasons for this including a preference for Canadian graduates by internship program directors, and the limited number of available internship positions which is closely tied to the number of domestic graduates produced annually. Repeated failure by GOFMS to obtain internship training has resulted in charges of racial and cultural discrimination. There have been lawsuits in other provinces and recently a hunger strike in British Columbia. A number of Provinces have established special programs for GOFMS.

In December, 1990, British Columbia's Cabinet approved funding for a small training program for GOFMS at St. Paul's Hospital in Vancouver with an annual budget of \$220,000. St. Paul's Hospital is responsible for the organization of the program. To apply, GOFMS must be resident in British Columbia and have passed the Medical Council of Canada Qualifying Exam, the same exam taken by Canadian graduates. In addition, the leading applicants will undergo an evaluation of clinical skills with the best two candidates being offered the two-year internship at St. Paul's Hospital leading to medical licensure in British Columbia. The former Provincial Ombudsman, Mr. Stephen Owen, reviewed the organization of the St. Paul's program and found no evidence of racial or cultural discrimination against GOFMS.

**DISCUSSION:**

In 1991, fifteen GOFMS applied to the program. Eight candidates met the eligibility criteria and participated in an evaluation of clinical skills. The two successful candidates have commenced prelicensure training, as has the third candidate on the merit-based list derived from the assessment process, for whom support has been found from a community group. Unsuccessful candidates will have their applications kept on file and may apply to program again in 1992.

The Director of Medical Education at St. Paul's Hospital has indicated that the support of the Ministry of Health has enabled the development of an evaluative program which has allowed the development of a merit based list of applicants. This has allowed community funding for special positions to continue without being subject to the criticism of discrimination.

The leader of the hunger strikers, Mr. John Bitonti, continues to claim that the additional training requirements faced by GOFMS, and the difficulties they face in obtaining internships through the usual process, constitute discrimination. He has announced his intention to pursue a human rights action.

**RECOMMENDED POSITION:**

The Ministry of Health continue its support for the small training program for GOFMS at St. Paul's Hospital.

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