

## Students worried PGY-1 changes could mean more training time

Medical students are interested in pursuing development of a common first year of postgraduate medical training, but only if it does not add to the overall training time required.

That message emerged clearly during the recent annual meeting of the Canadian Federation of Medical Students (CFMS) in Kingston, Ont., where participants eventually decided to develop a position paper. They also committed to further discussions on a series of standards that any common PGY-1 year will be required to meet.

The topic was introduced by Dr. Danielle Martin, immediate past president of the CFMS, who noted that the common year is an “extremely complicated” issue that has become a hot topic across the country. At the CMA’s annual meeting in August, for instance, several resolutions were passed that gave support in principle to a common PGY-1 year and to more flexibility in residency training.

Martin said feedback from students indicates support for the notion, but “the instant it lengthens our training by even 24 hours, it’s not on. And the in-

stant it become coercive, it’s not on.”

She said introduction of the common year may imply some form of limited licensure after its completion. Summarizing the PGY-1 debate, she warned that students “have to be very vigilant.”

Following the discussions, delegates developed an initial set of 10 principles that a common PGY-1 year will have to conform with to be acceptable to students. These included no increase in the total training time and assurance that the training will not be a repeat of the clinical clerkship. — *Pat Rich, CMAJ*

## Failure of WTO talks bleak news for health of world’s poor

September’s World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting about the arcane laws governing world trade may appear to have had little to do with the health status of poor nations, but in fact the failure of those talks is a serious blow to health throughout the developing world.

“Instead of open markets, there are too many barriers that stunt, stifle and starve,” Rubens Ricupero, secretary-general of the UN Conference on Trade and Development, said as he urged the world’s trade ministers to reach consensus quickly. “Instead of fair competition, there are subsidies by rich countries that tilt the playing field against the poor.”

One result, says the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), is that

800 million people in the developing world do not have enough to eat, despite food production that has considerably surpassed the rate of population growth. The FAO says the resulting undernourishment takes a heavy toll on both health and productivity, with about 6 million children under age 5 dying every year as a result of malnutrition.

“Far from being empowered [by laws governing international trade],” said Ricupero, “the fisherman in Viet Nam, the cotton grower in Burkina Faso and the indigenous cultivator of medicinal herbs in Brazil are being held down.”

Trade issues are often technical and do not generally lend themselves to media coverage like war or extreme weather, added Ricupero, “but let there be no doubt: the damage is profound, and the victims can be counted in the billions.”

Unfortunately, nothing will change following the WTO’s meeting in Cancún. The agriculture negotiations drew roughly 150 trade ministers to Mexico to deal with issues such as market access, domestic support and export subsidies. The meeting failed miserably in its attempts to give developing countries easier access to agricultural markets, and the failure has been touted as a major setback for the WTO, which referees trade between nations. Before its creation in 1995, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade governed world trade.

In an attempt to pick up the pieces, the WTO’s General Council will meet

in mid-December. An official with the organization said the meeting will deal with issues from the failed talks, including rules governing import restrictions, subsidies and programs that artificially raise or guarantee prices. Chances the WTO will achieve its self-imposed new-rules deadline of January 2005 appear slim, but it is hoped the December meeting will propel the talks closer to a conclusion.

The World Bank says an agreement that lowers tariff peaks and averages in both rich and developing countries could produce up to \$520 billion in income gains, which would increase growth in developing countries and lift an additional 140 million people out of poverty by 2015.

But Canadian farmers worry the negotiations could undermine agriculture here. Bob Friesen, president of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, says the current changes proposed by the WTO “would spell disaster” for Canadian farmers. He wants improved market access, the elimination of all subsidies and decreased domestic support. He says the federation’s position is in line with that of many developing nations, although Canada’s approach differs in some instances.

“We will be making every effort possible to promote Canada’s position, but we also want to demonstrate why our recommendations make sense for other countries as well,” Friesen said. — *Allison Ganley, CMAJ*



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During September’s WTO meeting in Mexico, South Korean farmer Kung Hae Lee stabbed himself to death to protest the rules governing agricultural trade.