



Residents' strike averted in Quebec

After 4 years without a contract and 6 years without a salary increase, 2000 medical residents in Quebec have voted to accept a new contract that will bring their salaries and tuition fees in line with those in other provinces. The late-April vote narrowly averted a general strike.

The agreement between the Fédération des Médecins Résidents du Québec (FMRQ) and Quebec's Ministry of Health and Social Services was reached Apr. 17, 2 days before rotating strikes were to begin. Negotiations had been under way for 3 years but had been stalled by the ministry for the past 18 months. Until the agreement was signed, Quebec residents had been among the lowest paid in the country.

One of the most contentious issues was tuition fees. Quebec's residents pay some of the highest fees in North America — \$3007 annually — for the privilege of taking residency training at

the province's 4 medical schools. Dr. Jean-François Cailhier, the FMRQ president, says it is "unthinkable that medical residents should have to pay tuition fees for providing care to the public for 72 hours a week."

Under the new agreement residents will pay only \$700 a year. The \$2300 difference between the amount paid last year and the amount stipulated in the new agreement will be reimbursed to residents by the provincial government. Many residents are angry that the agreement is not retroactive.

Dr. Shayna Zelcer, a 27-year-old pediatric resident at McGill University, says "it's pretty unfair that we were asked to pay tuition fees. We have 2 hours of formal teaching a week, yet we're paying full tuition. We're not functioning as students — we're licensed physicians who provide medical services in hospitals. My husband and I had to get loans, and a friend had to sell her car to pay her

fees." Zelcer, who is from Toronto, says it is common knowledge that lower salaries, higher tuition fees and the highest taxes in Canada discourage residents from coming to Quebec to fulfil their residency requirements.

The residents' association also won a salary increase. "We were at the tail-end, among the lowest paid in the country," says Cailhier. Residents have been granted the same increases as the rest of the public service (2% for the period from 1996 to 1998 and 5% spread from 1999 to 2002), and this will rank them fourth or fifth in Canada.

Dr. Derek Puddester, president of the Canadian Association of Internes and Residents, is pleased by the outcome in Quebec. "I think that what the FMRQ did was very courageous and thoughtful. The bottom line is that the federation was willing to represent and advocate for its members." — © Susan Pinker, Montreal



Reduce the risk of SIDS

Each week, 3 Canadian babies die of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). The cause of SIDS is not known but there are ways to reduce the risk. Health Canada, the Canadian Paediatric Society, the Canadian Institute of Child Health and the Canadian Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths have published a brochure and poster outlining 4 simple preventive measures: ensuring that babies sleep on their back, creating a smoke- and drug-free environment before and after birth, keeping babies warm but not hot, and encouraging breast-feeding.

For information call 800 363-7437, or visit www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/childhood-youth.