

## Medical Withdrawal Policy for Undergraduate Medical Students

<b>Office of Accountability:</b>	Office of the Dean, Faculty of Medicine
<b>Office of Administrative Responsibility:</b>	Undergraduate Medical Education Office
<b>Approver:</b>	Undergraduate Medical Studies Committee
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### Overview

Medical education programs place significant intellectual, physical, and emotional demands on students. Thus, it is the responsibility of the medical school is to ensure that there exists “an effective system of personal counselling...that includes programs to promote the well-being of students and facilitate their adjustment to the physical and emotional demands of medical school” (Committee on Accreditation of Canadian Medical Schools (**CACMS**) **Element 12.3**).

The maintenance of mental and physical health is a key factor in the success of medical school students. Students experiencing health challenges are encouraged to seek the necessary supports and collaborate with service providers to enable them to effectively manage these challenges. From time-to-tome, the health challenges of a student may be of such as serious nature as to necessitate the withdrawal of the student. This policy outlines the circumstances under which such students may elect or be required to withdraw and the procedures that must be followed.

### Policy

- 1.0 A medical student who develops a physical or mental illness may elect or be required to withdraw from the M.D. program if any or all of the following conditions exist:
  - 1.1. the illness affects the student’s ability to successfully complete the requirements of the academic curriculum; or,

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- 1.2. continuation in the program would put the student at risk for illness progression; or,
- 1.3. the student poses a significant risk to the health or safety of self or others; or,
- 1.4. the student's continued participation in the program would substantially impede the educational process for them or others.

### **Procedures for Withdrawal**<sup>1</sup>

Procedures for withdrawal from the Faculty of Medicine for medical reasons will typically follow the university guidelines as specified under "Withdrawing from the university without academic prejudice" (Regulation 5.4.7.2<sup>2</sup>). A student should not be subject to involuntary withdrawal under these procedures if the student's circumstances can best be addressed through other responses. If withdrawal is deemed to be the most appropriate course of action, there should be efforts made to persuade the student to withdraw voluntarily before initiating the involuntary withdrawal process.

#### **A.0 Interim Involuntary Withdrawal**

- A.1 If safety is an immediate concern, the university may take interim action to protect the well-being of the student and/or other members of the university community by removing the student from the university for a period of up to ten (10) days while the matter is investigated. Section 6.6, "Urgent situations and interim conditions", of the Code of Student Conduct for Memorial University of Newfoundland also authorizes the Head of the Campus to impose interim conditions when appropriate.

#### **B.0 Referral of Students for Supportive Services**

- B.1 Any member of the university community who has reason to believe that a medical student may be at risk due to physical or mental health concerns will notify the Student Wellness Consultant. The Consultant will

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<sup>1</sup> These procedures draw extensively from procedures articulated by the following institutions: University of Michigan, Indiana State University, University of Connecticut, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey.

<sup>2</sup> All Regulations referenced in this policy are as stated in the 2009-2010 calendar

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meet with the student to discuss the matter and, if appropriate, explore what, if any, supportive services have been accessed by the student. The Consultant may recommend further services and supports that need to be accessed. If the student's academic performance has been impacted by the physical or mental health concerns or if it is felt that consideration should be given for the student to withdraw, the Consultant will discuss with the student the extent to which the Undergraduate Medical Education Office (Phase Lead, as appropriate) is aware of the student's circumstances. If the Phase Lead is unaware of the student's health concerns but it is believed that it may be in the best interest of the student for the Phase Lead to be informed, the Consultant will discuss with the student the information that should be communicated and how it will be communicated. In most instances, a meeting would occur among the Phase Lead, the student and the Student Wellness Consultant to discuss relevant information and decide appropriate next steps with respect to the academic program. At all times, consideration must be given to the need to protect the student's right to privacy and confidentiality.

### **C.0 Medical or Psychological Evaluation**

C.1 Prior to any recommendation for withdrawal (voluntary or involuntary), the student will ordinarily be required to undergo an evaluation by a relevant health professional(s). Any costs associated with this evaluation will be incurred by the Faculty of Medicine. The evaluation should be carried out by a health professional who is acceptable to the Faculty of Medicine but who has no involvement in the academic evaluation or promotion of the student to be evaluated<sup>3</sup>. The student will be asked to sign releases deemed necessary for the conduct or communication of this assessment. A student who refuses to undergo an evaluation or provide consent necessary for consideration of the evaluation may be subject to interim involuntary withdrawal and/or disciplinary action.

### **D.0 Recommendation for Withdrawal**

D.1 If the student's health is such that any or all of the conditions requiring

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<sup>3</sup> Refer to LCME Standard MS-27-A

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withdrawal are met, the Phase Lead (as appropriate), in consultation with the Associate Dean of UGME, may determine that it is in the best interest of the student to withdraw from the undergraduate medical education program. The Phase Lead will meet with the student to encourage him/her to withdraw voluntarily. The Student Wellness Consultant will attend this meeting unless it is the express wish of the student that he/she not attend. If the student agrees to withdraw voluntarily, he or she will write a letter to the Associate Dean of UGME, notifying him or her of this decision. Such letters must be accompanied by supporting medical documentation. The Associate Dean will then communicate this information to the Dean of Faculty of Medicine. The Dean, in consultation with the appropriate Phase Lead, the Student Wellness Consultant, the Associate Dean of UGME and the student will determine the conditions for readmission. The Dean will then write to the student, acknowledging the student's decision to withdraw and outlining the conditions that must be met for readmission.

- D.2 If the student does not agree to withdraw voluntarily, a recommendation of involuntary withdrawal, along with supporting documentation, will be referred by the Coordinator to the Student Health Advisory Team who will complete a review of the recommendation within five (5) working days of receipt. The student will be notified when such a recommendation is made and will be provided with an opportunity, if desired, to make representation to the Advisory Team.

### **E.0 Student Health Advisory Team**

- E.1 The Dean of Medicine will establish a "Student Health Advisory Team" that will consider and decide upon the responses to be made to a student who is recommended for withdrawal but who does not choose to withdraw voluntarily. This Team shall also respond to requests from students to be considered for medical withdrawal if the time period for voluntary withdrawal without academic prejudice has elapsed but the student believes that she/he has circumstances which may require them to withdraw for medical reasons. In addition to evaluating whether the student meets the criteria for medical withdrawal, this team may also consider and make recommendations regarding supportive services that

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should be accessed by the student in an effort to address the health concerns. The Team shall be comprised of:

- E.1.1 A Faculty Member (MD) appointed by the Dean (2 year term);
  - E.1.2 A representative involved in health/counselling services appointed by the Dean (2 year term);
  - E.1.3 A Student Representative elected by the Medical Student Society<sup>4</sup> (1 year term).
- E.2 The Team shall conduct itself as follows:
- E.2.1 The Phase Lead will convene meetings as required and chair the meetings;
  - E.2.2 Meetings will be called when a recommendation for withdrawal is forwarded to the Team;
  - E.2.3 The relevant Phase Lead and the student who is recommended for withdrawal will be invited to attend. The student will also be permitted to have an advisor present;
  - E.2.4 The Phase Lead will be asked to present information and answer questions regarding the recommendation. The student and the advisor (if present) may not question the presenter;
  - E.2.5 The student will then be invited to address the Advisory Committee;
  - E.2.6 The Phase Lead, the Student and any advisor present will be excused for the Team's deliberations but may be recalled to answer questions of clarification posed by the Committee.

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<sup>4</sup> The student recommended for involuntary withdrawal may waive the right to have student representation on this committee. In such instances, a Resident, nominated by the Provincial Association of Interns and Residents (PAIRN) will sit on this committee to deliberate and participate in decision making with respect to this recommendation.

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- E.3 The Team may reach one of the following recommendations:
- E.3.1 Recommend that the student withdraw from the medical education program for medical reasons. In such instances, students may be offered supportive services;
  - E.3.2 Recommend that the student access supportive services and provide progress reports to the team within a specified timeframe. In this instance, with the approval of the relevant Phase Lead, the student may be permitted to continue with some or all aspects of the medical education program while he/she is undergoing further treatment;
  - E.3.3 Recommend that the student be allowed to carry on in the medical education program with no further intervention required unless a change in circumstances indicates a need for further review.
- E.4 If the Student Health Advisory Team supports the recommendation that the student withdraw, the student may choose to voluntarily withdraw at this time. If the student does not wish to voluntarily withdraw, the Team will advise the Dean of its recommendation. The Advisory Team may also make recommendations regarding conditions for readmission. As per University Regulation 9.3.6 the Dean, on behalf of the Faculty, will recommend such withdrawal to the Registrar.

### **F.0 Protection of Confidential Information**

- F.1 All public bodies in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, including Memorial University of Newfoundland, are subject to the provisions of the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act. As such, all students, faculty, and staff must be vigilant in their efforts to ensure the protection of confidential medical information (verbal and written) of students. Caution should be taken in the sharing of information via electronic media. Names, initials or other identifying information should only be used when absolutely necessary. All persons must be aware that confidential information should only be shared as necessary. When

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students are being considered for medical withdrawal, all relevant withdrawal documentation will be maintained in a single confidential file in the Office of Student Affairs. Only the Dean, The Associate Dean, the Phase Lead , the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs, the Student Wellness Consultant and members of the Student Health Advisory Team may access this information. Copies of any student's confidential documentation must be destroyed as soon as its usefulness has been exhausted and no later than one year following the graduation of the student.

- F.2 Decisions of the Student Health Advisory Team will be included in the UGME file only if they contain recommendations for changes to the student's medical education program completion. If withdrawal occurs, official correspondence between the Faculty and the Registrar's Office regarding the medical withdrawal shall be copied to the UGME file.

### **G.0 Appeal of Involuntary Withdrawal**

- G.1 A student has the right to make a formal appeal of a decision that requires them to withdraw involuntarily. Within ten (10) working days of receiving the decision in writing, the student who wishes to appeal the decision must indicate, in writing, the grounds for the appeal and provide supporting documentation, duly authenticated. The appeal should be directed in the first instance to the Registrar of the University. The Registrar, in consultation with the Dean, will determine whether or not the grounds stated are sufficient to warrant a formal hearing of the appeal.

### **H.0 Readmission**

- H.1 A student who has withdrawn (voluntarily or involuntarily) under this procedure and who wishes to be considered for readmission may wish to discuss their return and actions that must be taken to facilitate their return with the Student Wellness Consultant. Once the decision has been made to return, the student shall contact the Dean and provide a written request with appropriate documentation to comply with the conditions of readmission.

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- H.2 Within five (5) days of receipt of this request, the Student Wellness Consultant and the Associate Dean of UGME will meet with the student to review the request and ascertain the student's eligibility for readmission based upon the student's academic record and whether the conditions for readmission have been met. As per University Regulation 5.4.7.3, students who have withdrawn from the University for medical reasons may not be permitted to re-enter unless they can provide medical evidence, satisfactory to the Director of Student Health Service, of fitness to pursue studies.
- H.3 Based upon this review, the decision regarding readmission and appropriate date for return will be made and communicated to the student, in writing, by the Associate Dean within five (5) days of meeting with the student. The Associate Dean will also report the decision, in writing, to the Dean. The Dean will notify the Registrar if the student is readmitted to the program.