

Jane Philpott

Tue 8/4/2020 9:25 AM

To: Mark Mercer

Cc: Patrick Deane; Chris Simpson; +4 others

Dear Dr. Mercer,

I write in response to your letter of July 29 wherein you raise concerns regarding our recent decision to direct our QuARMS stream to Black and Indigenous applicants. You have raised points which have been part of the internal dialogue since the inception of QuARMS and, more recently, as we undertook this modification. Let me address a few points that may help you better understand the program itself and our motivation in making these changes.

You have accurately described the general QuARMS process in your letter, but I would like to further point out that admission to QuARMS does not necessarily assure entry to the study of medicine. After the two undergraduate years, students are invited to apply to entry to the MD program. The major difference is that their application is judged against pre-set objectives which, if achieved, lead to admission. Students are therefore expected to meet those objectives but are not judged against the entire applicant pool. And so, while it is true that that students are *“accepted into the four-year MD program at the Queen’s School of Medicine without first earning a Bachelor’s degree or writing the Medical College Admissions Test”*, it is inaccurate to assume they do so without the need to demonstrate they merit that privilege through their conduct and academic success during their two undergraduate years.

I would agree with your point that hardship, financial or otherwise, is not race specific. No racial or cultural group is immune from such barriers, and it cannot be assumed that all members of any group are invariably affected. Accordingly, the admission process for QuARMS will incorporate a number of considerations intended to identify need within the Black and Indigenous applicants. In addition, our admissions group has been working diligently to develop methods to better identify and address such needs within our general applicant pool. In short, admission to QuARMS will require demonstration of need, and our concern regarding unintended barriers to medical education is not limited to the QuARMS initiative.

We are sensitive to your point that there are many groups within Canadian society who have experienced systematic disadvantage that impacts their ability to achieve personal goals. However, our consideration of Indigenous historical issues as crystallized in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report and Recommendations, and recent perspectives arising from the anti-Black racism and Black Lives Matter movements have convinced us that, at this point in our collective cultural history, these two groups merit particular attention.

Finally, I would point out that QuARMS initiative was undertaken several years ago after much discussion. In the end, the opportunity to lessen financial and societal barriers to medical education, and the potential to develop a more valuable, fulfilling and nurturing pre-medical experience for students were key determinants in the decision to move forward. It was our intention, as you’ve surmised, to consider whether this model might inform and lead to reforms in the overall process for admission to medical education. We continue to consider that option as we gain more experience. However, our experience to date suggests that many aspects of the program are ideally suited to address key issues

particularly relevant to the Black and Indigenous applicants. In short, we felt QuARMS provides a unique opportunity to address our commitment to Black and Indigenous communities.

The decision to limit QuARMS to Black and Indigenous applicants was not taken lightly, and we both respect and appreciate the concerns that you and your colleagues have raised. At the same time, we feel that this decision addresses key contemporary social issues within our society while not abrogating our commitment to addressing barriers to medical education faced by many deserving applicants.

Thank you for your thoughtful comments.

Sincerely,

Jane Philpott

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