

John W. Pearce, PhD, CPsych
President-elect
Canadian Council of Professional Psychology Programs

March 16, 2002

The Honourable Tony Clement
Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
80 Grosvenor Street,
Hepburn Block, 10th Floor,
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 2C4

Dear Sir:

Re: St. Michael's Hospital Psychology Department and Internship

The Canadian Council of Professional Psychology Programs (CCPPP) is an organization that represents university psychology programs and psychology internship programs in Canada that train clinical psychologists, counseling psychologists, and clinical neuropsychologists. CCPPP has a membership of over 70 university and internship programs, which in turn include hundreds of academic staff, internship supervisors, graduate students, and psychology interns across Canada.

As President-elect of CCPPP, I have been asked by our organization to convey our gravest concerns about the recent decision to shut down the psychology department at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto. This will deprive the public, especially those individuals with limited financial resources, of essential services. Psychological assessment and interventions have been repeatedly shown in controlled trials to be effective in identifying and treating psychological disorders in children and adults. Similar research has also found psychological interventions to be effective as adjunctive treatments for medical conditions such as heart disease, cancer, and diabetes. Psychological services reduce the use of emergency rooms, hospitalization, pharmaceuticals, and physician visits, thereby resulting in a very significant financial saving to the health-care system.

As well as terminating the employment of the professional psychology staff, this decision has resulted in the loss of the psychology internship at St. Michael's which had accommodated two doctoral interns. Successful completion of a pre-doctoral internship is a mandatory and integral requirement for students enrolled in professional psychology training programs. Internships are reserved for graduate students who have completed all Ph.D. course work and candidacy examinations. A significant proportion of students has already successfully defended their Ph.D. dissertations. Students applying for internship have, at a minimum, 600 hours of previous supervised practicum experience, although most have many more (1200-1600 hours on average). The internship is a year-long intensive experience that immerses these advanced students in clinical work, socializes them into the professional work world, and trains them to work

collaboratively with a wide array of health care professionals. Many Canadian students complete their internships in health care settings such as acute and chronic adult and pediatric hospitals and rehabilitation centers.

Clearly, the elimination of internship positions reduces the accessibility of this essential and mandatory training component, and eventually the number of professionals who will be able to offer cost-effective services to Canadians. Our concern has been exacerbated by the internships in the Toronto area that have already been lost (e.g., Credit Valley Hospital, Toronto General). A reduction in internships means that more students who must pursue this advanced training will have to seek appointments out-of-province or out-of-country. Interns often remain in the locale in which they completed their training, which increases the chances that professional psychology graduates from Ontario will not return to their home province.

We urge the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the administration of St. Michael's Hospital to seriously re-consider this decision. While eliminating the Psychology Department at St. Michael's Hospital may well save money in the short-term, ultimately this step will prove detrimental to the training of professional psychologists and the provision of cost-effective health services to the public. Please do not hesitate to contact me at (403) 229-7886 if you would like to discuss this matter.

Sincerely yours,

John W. Pearce, PhD, CPsych
President-elect
Canadian Council of Professional Psychology Programs

cc: Mr. Jeffrey Lozon
Chief Executive Officer
St. Michael's Hospital

Dr. Janice Cohen
President
Canadian Council of Professional Psychology Programs

Dr. Ian Nicholson
Past-president
Hospital Psychology Association of Ontario

Dr. John Service
Executive Director
Canadian Psychological Association