



**An article to be submitted to the Windsor Star for the Essex County Medical Society column:**

**Southwestern Ontario Medical Education Network Windsor (SWOMEN Windsor)**

**What is SWOMEN Windsor?**

The Southwestern Ontario Medical Education Network Windsor was formed in 2002 as a result of a collaboration between the Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry at The University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario; the University of Windsor (U of W); and the two Windsor hospitals. It is not an independent medical school. Rather it is the Windsor campus of Western Medicine & Dentistry with strong links to the U of W, Windsor Regional Hospital and Hotel Dieu Grace Hospital.

There are three components to SWOMEN. Western serves as the major academic hub, SWOMEN Windsor serves as the major community medicine hub, and SWOMEN Rural Medicine is the rural medicine hub.

**Why was SWOMEN formed?**

The primary purpose of SWOMEN is to help relieve the chronic shortage of physicians and surgeons in Southwestern Ontario. A secondary purpose is to provide a continuum of medical education from tertiary academic medicine to regional community care to rural medicine in smaller communities that span Southwestern Ontario outside of London and Windsor.

There is a general tendency for physicians to establish practice in areas where they have received a significant part of their clinical training. In addition, by providing training in sites that cover academic, community and rural medicine, graduates from Western's program will be ready to practise in an environment beyond the traditional centres for academic medicine only.

**How many clerks and residents are coming to Windsor?**

Starting in September 2003, there will be 14 full-time equivalent third-year clerks coming to Windsor. Of these, nine will spend their entire year here while a significant number will be here completing six to 12 week rotations. Next September, there will be 24 full time third-year clerks in the program, representing 20 per cent of the class at Western.

We are anticipating 24 residents for 2003/4 and 32 residents for 2004/5.

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### **What is the difference between a third year clerk and a resident?**

Students are admitted to the Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry at Western after at least three years of undergraduate studies at a Canadian or U.S. university. Acceptance to medical schools in Canada is very competitive. The medical curriculum at Western consists of four years of core training. The third year clerkship is especially important because this is the time medical students learn clinical medicine and make decisions based on their clinical experience as to their future career choices. It is 52 weeks of a very structured program.

A resident is someone who has already graduated from medical school. He/she is pursuing post-graduate medical training in order to qualify as a family physician or specialist.

### **How do we know at this point if SWOMEN Windsor project is helping to attract MDs to our area?**

It is too early to tell yet. However our preliminary observation is very favourable, since there are at least 26 physicians waiting to be processed to come to Windsor and Essex County to set up their practice.

In addition, the Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry at Western has expanded enrolment from 97 to 133 students per year as of September 2003. Applicants who reside in Southwestern Ontario will be offered preferred status to allow them to reach the interviewing process. The interview is an essential process to determine admission eligibility to Western.

We continue to receive a lot of interest from Western's medical students to come to Windsor for training. This can be attributed to the successful Discovery Days events organized in November and June, which invited Western medical students to come and experience Windsor. The students were impressed by the hospital facilities and equipment, the enthusiasm of the medical and nursing staff, the social and recreational opportunities Windsor offers, as well as the heart-felt community support they received when they were here.

### **How will things be different for me as a patient with SWOMEN Windsor initiative?**

If your physician is involved as a SWOMEN faculty member, the next time you see your doctor in the hospital, clinic or office, you may well be asked if you would be willing to be seen by a clinical clerk or resident to help him/her learn more about medicine.

The availability of clerks and residents in the hospitals when they are on call means a greater access to medical personnel for acute emergencies.

The clerks and residents are bright and intellectually inquisitive. They are up-to-date with medical literature and they can provide new angles to analyse patients' symptoms and signs. They will add an important element to the clinical decision-making process.

One of the joys of teaching is that medical education is a continuous learning experience. As we learn new concepts and ideas from new clinical evidence, we try to apply them to our patients. Thus the teacher and student stimulate each other to incorporate the best clinical evidence for the optimization of patient care.

### **Where are the clerks and residents staying in Windsor?**

Part-time clerks and residents will be staying close to the hospitals to facilitate their on call duties. SWOMEN Windsor has rented homes close to the Windsor Regional Hospital. Full-time clerks have all found their own accommodations in Windsor.

The rented units close to the Windsor Regional Hospital for part-time clerks and residents are being cleaned, upgraded and furnished to provide a reasonable level of comfort for the clerks and residents. We have an amazing group of volunteers spearheaded by Mr. Bob Keech and his family who are contributing their time, efforts and money to bring this into reality. Local businesses and unions have been generous donors to help furnish these units.

### **Who are SWOMEN Windsor faculty?**

To date we have recruited more than 160 faculty members. Most of them are local family physicians and specialists. This represents more than 60 per cent of the active pool of MDs in Windsor.

Given the fact that these teachers only receive token remunerations for teaching clerks and residents and that it can be a very time-consuming process, we are thrilled by this phenomenal response.

There has been some exchange in faculty members between the London and Windsor campuses since the creation of SWOMEN Windsor. For example, Dr. Leonardo Cortese, an eminent psychiatrist who specializes in schizophrenia, has transferred here from London.

Having a medical school affiliation will no doubt facilitate faculty recruitment in Windsor. The benefits however extend to the entire Essex county since most consultants in Windsor look after referrals from the entire county.

### **What can I do to contribute to the cause of SWOMEN Windsor?**

Since clerks and residents come here to learn medicine, one of the greatest gifts you can bestow on them is to agree to be interviewed and examined by them. If you do so, remember that although they have been highly selected based on their academic achievements before they enter medicine, they are young and often inexperienced clinically. Thus, it may take them a much longer time to gather information and examine you. In other words, they may be very thorough. Please be patient with them!

Leaving a good and friendly impression with these future doctors increases the chance that they will choose to return to Windsor to practise upon completion of their training.

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In the past year, some well written articles have appeared in the same column warning of the consequences of the serious lack of medical and nursing personnel in Windsor and Essex County. While SWOMEN Windsor is not a cure-all, I sincerely believe that the project is an important milestone. For the first time, I am beginning to see light at the end of the tunnel. We are starting to be able to recruit new physicians to our area with greater ease.

Much work remains to be done. I applaud the dedication of people like Mr. Ted Farron, Mrs. Joan Mavrinnac and Dr. Ian McLeod who have spent countless hours volunteering to lure physicians to our area. The Physician Recruitment Committee in Windsor and Essex County is to be commended and it deserves our moral and financial support!

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