



## Training the Humanitarian Pharmacist

### Humanitarian Pharmacy Training at Pharmacists Without Borders, Canada

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Pharmacists Without Borders, Mali

#### Introduction

Pharmacists Without Borders is an international constellation of branches, each providing the movement with unique and valuable assets, through individualized sets of goals and objectives. The Canadian branch has decided to focus its activities mainly around Human Resources, with the aim of becoming an important player in the field of specialized pharmacists in humanitarian work. As of September 2005, a new committee was formed within Pharmacists Without Borders Canada, named the Training Committee. It oversees an important project consisting of a training module offered to pharmacy students in the last years of their program, entitled "Introduction to the Humanitarian experience". It is hoped that this new option will be integrated into the curriculum of pharmacy programs in Canada, starting at the Université de Montréal. The foundation of this ambitious project is an annual internship developed by Pharmacists Without Borders Canada, taking place in Mali, and described in more details herein.

Our long-term goal is to establish a program that will be integrated into undergraduate programs across Canada, which will allow graduating students to participate in an internship abroad. We plan to institute a 45-hour preparatory course and to find environments that would benefit from the aptitudes of pharmacists following a humanitarian vocation, and offer safe and interesting training milieus to pharmacists in training.

#### The 2006 experience

The pilot project held in 2006 benefited from the participation of two third-year pharmacy students from the Université de Montréal, and consisted of a month-long internship in Mali under the supervision of an experienced Canadian humanitarian pharmacist and founding member of the training committee.

Prior to their departure, the students underwent training at Mer et Monde, a non-governmental organization specializing in sustainable development in Senegal, a country that borders Mali. This training program dealt primarily with various aspects of humanitarian aid and sustainable development, but also included familiarization with the local culture, geography, politics and traditions. The training was overseen by the accompanying pharmacist, who supplied the two students with further vital information concerning essential medications, the proper use of medical supplies warehouses (inventory, filing, etc.), the rational use of medication and proper pharmacy practices.

Acting as the internship supervisor, Emmanuelle Gallay worked along with two major partners: Sahel 21, an onsite organization providing all the technical and logistical support for the mission, and the Fondation Marcelle et Jean Coutu, the sole sponsor of the pilot project. ►

The objectives of the pilot program were:

- to ascertain the possibility for an annual internship program in this country;
- to evaluate the environment and analyse future possibilities;
- and to establish contacts with various key local people.

Following our initial evaluation, Mali was found a favourable ground for future internship programs. Furthermore, the pilot project in Mali has allowed us to:

- Establish contacts with the following people involved in the pharmaceutical community:
  - Key person responsible for Sahel 21
  - The dean of the faculty of pharmacy at the University of Bamako
  - Personnel at several community health center and at the University Hospital of Bamako
  - The president of the national council of the Mali College of Pharmacists
  - Several local pharmacists and pharmacy students both in community pharmacies and at the University of Bamako.
- Evaluate the needs of Mali in terms of pharmaceutical expertise;
- Understand the Mali health system, both in rural and urban settings;
- Understand the university curriculum related to pharmacy studies in Mali;
- Consider acting as a bridging organization between the Université de Montréal and the Université de Bamako;
- Be better prepared to face eventual medical challenges, such as hospitalization.

Through the realisations of the pilot internship project, we have established professional relationships with various key contacts in Canada and abroad. The collaboration between Pharmacists Without Borders Canada and its partners opens possibilities to a multitude of concerted projects.

### The 2007 experience

In October 2006, the possibility of enrolling in an internship with Pharmacists Without Borders was announced and has received much attention from the student community. As the number of participants was restricted to six, students had to be selected, and only the most meriting were chosen. The screening process included motivational questionnaires, individual and groups interviews, and required consent of the selected participants to undergo a 6-month training program.

Furthermore, the viability of the project required the recruitment of internship supervisors, formed in humanitarian work and in student supervision. Two such candidates were selected, each with a different background. The first was specialized in community pharmacy work, and the



Pharmacists Without Borders, Pilot Project 2006, Mali

second in hospital pharmacy practice, to ensure that students would benefit from a maximum of expertise.

The goals of the training program, developed specifically to target health issues in Mali, were two-fold: (1) to develop student awareness to the realities of developing countries and be able to face the cultural shock, and (2) to focus on local pathologies and healthcare possibilities, with an emphasis on prevention, non-pharmacological treatments and availability of local pharmacological therapies.

To ensure student participation and render the learning process interactive, students were asked to present, in 30 to 60 minutes, on selected topics relevant to Mali health issues. An expert was asked to complete the information presented by students, in no more than 2 hours, thus resulting in 3-hour bimonthly class. Six topics were selected and included warehouse management (list of national essential medications and inventory control); HIV, AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases; malaria, tuberculosis and parasitoses; malnutrition, dehydration and laboratory monitoring; infant illnesses and the Malian vaccination schedule; and issues in pregnancy, breastfeeding and birth control. Class objectives included the identification of the pathology and physiology of these diseases, recommendation of preventive measures, identification of non-pharmacological and pharmacological treatments, and ability to provide pharmaceutical care in the Malian context.

The training committee also saw fit to include two week-end-long sessions, which focused on the socio-cultural, political and economical realities of Mali. During these sessions, subjects such as the cultural shock, communication with patients of different cultures and languages, and the meaning of international collaboration and sustainable development were approached. These week-



ends also proved effective to develop a team spirit, and to elaborate projects to be implanted in Mali. These include warehouse management of rural health centers, public health awareness programs in both rural and urban health centers, and an information session on the importance of hand washing in a hospital center.

The 2007 group of pharmacy students and supervising pharmacists will leave in June 2007, for a duration of 8 weeks. The group will then be separated in two, and will spend 4 weeks in either urban or rural milieu. The groups will then switch settings to allow students to experience humanitarian work in both regions. As a consequence, each welcoming structure will benefit of 8 weeks of uninterrupted pharmaceutical expertise and all students will have the chance to interact with healthcare professionals in both settings.

#### Conclusion and future direction of the program

The realisation of the 2007 project will be a crucial step in the evolution of our program. Preliminary steps have been completed to potentially include the current internship opportunity in the upcoming Pharm. D. program at Université de Montréal. Furthermore, the partnerships Pharmacists Without Borders Canada has acquired, both logistic and financial, have proved highly beneficial to all parties included. In the close future, the main challenge will remain to match the demand from students with the limited number of positions we can offer abroad. Overall, this is a highly inspiring project for the pharmacy community, as it is specific to pharmacy students (unlike other humanitarian programs that train larger eclectic group of students) and introduces them to a new career possibility.

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