An open letter to St. John’s family doctors regarding the MUNMed Gateway Project:

We are writing to you today to ask you to join the medical students of Memorial University of Newfoundland in a new and exciting medical student initiative called “The Gateway Project.” This project will partner first- and second-year medical students with new Canadian immigrants and refugees in a medical history-taking project to aid their integration into the Canadian health care system. In order for this to be successful, we need your help!

St. John’s receives approximately 200 refugees each year. A number of family doctors in the city are already providing wonderful care to these new Canadians. However, many of these new Canadians don’t have family doctors; this is in part due to language barriers, lack of translators, and transportation issues, often combined with very complicated medical histories. The MUNMed Gateway Project will attempt to reduce these barriers by allowing medical students to work with interpreters to collect medically relevant information from these individuals. We will not be doing physical exams, nor will we be providing medical care.

After the initial interview, we are proposing to pair these patients (along with their newly-acquired medical histories) with physicians like you who want to help these newcomers as much as we do. If you are willing to accept these new patients, we will then arrange an appointment through your office for regular medical care. Students will also follow up with the individuals they interviewed to ensure they were able to attend their appointments.

In the beginning, these interviews will take place on one afternoon each week throughout the year at the Association for New Canadians language school; we may expand if the pilot project is successful.

The project is a collaboration of the Faculty of Medicine at Memorial University of Newfoundland and the Association for New Canadians. It is endorsed by Dr. James Rourke, the Dean of Medicine, as well as Dr. Mary Wells (Assistant Dean of Undergraduate Medical Education) and Dr. June Harris (Assistant Dean of Student Affairs). Our faculty advisors for the Gateway Project are Dr. Fern Brunger (Assistant Professor of Health Care Ethics) and Dr. Pauline Duke (family doctor, Family Practice Unit).

We would like you to consider two ways of helping:

- We are looking for doctors who are willing to help out and accept a limited number of refugees as new patients.
- We are also looking for a few physician volunteers with whom be available to consult by telephone only during the initial interviews, should the need arise. (i.e. Should the patient be assessed by a physician or emergency department today?)
We have discussed the project with the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Newfoundland and Labrador as well as CMPA and have incorporated their recommendations.

If you are interested in helping out with this initiative in one of these capacities, or in any other way, please let us know. A volunteer with our project will give you a call in a couple of weeks to answer any questions you may have. Dr. Leslie Rourke of the CME office has offered to provide a number of vouchers toward CME courses as thanks for taking part.

We appreciate your support and thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Gateway Project coordinators

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