

A Preliminary Look at the Social Background and Finances of Dalhousie Medical Students

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Students in this Faculty will recall the questionnaire about their background and finances which was distributed to them in the spring of 1962 and will undoubtedly be interested in learning about some of the findings. Co-operation was good; 186 of the 217 First to Fourth Year students returned completed questionnaires, including 127 of the 156 students in the four years who are resident in the Atlantic Provinces. These latter comprise 96 single and 31 married students.

Analysis of the questionnaires is by no means complete, and, in addition, it has proved difficult to find some of the relevant population and finance figures without which it is not possible to make comparisons that have value or meaning. However, some interesting and valuable data have been extracted which are summarized in the tables and comments which follow.

HOME BACKGROUND: The size of the community and the financial, educational and occupational status of the parents of our medical students are examined in Tables I and II. The figures in Table I do not differ markedly from the only comparable data which seem to be available, that on American medical students in 1957 (J. Med. Education, 33: 248, 1958). At that time, for instance, the American medical student's origin was—rural 9%, town 16%, city 75%. His father's income was under \$5,000 in 25% of the sample and over \$5,000 in 75%. The father's educational category in that study was 22% primary, 28% high school and 50% with some college education.

Another interesting way of looking at our medical student population is in terms of their own age group rather than that of the population as a whole. The rural, town and city populations in the Atlantic Provinces in 1956, aged 21 to 24, were 49,600, 15,550 and 32,150 respectively. Assuming that the 156 resident students would be distributed in the same proportion as the 127 who completed the questionnaire, then the rate of production of medical students is as follows:

Rural	0.4	} Per 1000 aged 21 - 24
Town	2.2	
City	3.2	
Total	1.6	

This latter figure compares well with an annual rate for the entry into this Faculty from Nova Scotia of 1.3 - 1.8 per 1000 based on births 21 years previously, taken from our records of the past 30 years.

The conclusions to be drawn from the tables and discussion above are not too surprising but are nonetheless disturbing. It is quite obvious that a young person from a city, with reasonably well-to-do and well-educated parents, is enormously more likely to become a medical student than one from a rural area whose family compares

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TABLE 1.

Data on the Home Background of 127 Medical Students at Dalhousie University in 1961 - 62.
(Residents of the Atlantic Provinces only)

	Atlantic Provinces Population	Dalhousie Medical Students
Population Distribution		
Rural (under 1000 population)	51%	13%
Town (1000 - 9999 population)	16	22
City (over 10,000 population)	33	65
Income of Father		
Low (under \$3000)	81%	15%
Medium (\$3000 - 4999)	16	20
High (over \$5000)	3	65
Education of Father		
Primary schooling only (0 - 8 years)	69%	19%
High School (9 - 12 years)	26	46
Some College Education (13 years or more)	5	35
Education of Mother		
Primary schooling only (0 - 8 years)	57%	17%
High School (9 - 12 years)	38	52
Some College Education (13 years or more)	5	31

unfavorably as regards finances and education. This unfortunate state of affairs is of course not confined to potential medical students, but it points up once again the wastage of human resources that is so often commented on and which can only be remedied by changes in moral values, leading successively to economic changes and educational improvements in depressed areas of this region.

In Table II the occupation of the fathers of Dalhousie medical students who are residents is compared with the distribution of all "wage-earners" in the Atlantic Provinces' population. There is nothing surprising in this table; it merely reinforces the conclusion from Table I that the probability of anyone attending medical school is reflected in the educational and financial status of the father. The preponderance of physicians' children when compared with the number from other professions only reflects, I think, the advantageous position from which they have been able to observe the profession and find it to their liking. Certainly it is not due to any special preference on the part of the Faculty.

TABLE II.

Occupation of Fathers of 127 Medical Students at Dalhousie University, 1961-62.
(Residents of Atlantic Provinces only)

Occupation of Father	"Wage-Earners" Atlantic Provinces Population	Dalhousie Medical Students
Proprietor, manager	7.0%	6.3%
Physician	0.2	18.9
Other professional	6.3	7.1
Commercial, financial	5.8	23.6
Clerical	5.1	3.9
Manufacturing, mechanical	9.8	8.7
Transport, communication	9.9	6.3
Construction	6.2	4.7
Service	11.9	7.1
Farming, mining, logging, fishing	28.5	13.4
Other and not specified	9.4	—

FINANCES: It was quite clear from even a cursory examination of the questionnaires that the typical medical student knows exactly how much money he has available in one academic year and he knows precisely where he got this money from. However, he seems to have a very unclear notion of the details of his disposition of this money.

As a consequence, much of Table III, showing estimated annual expenditures of medical students is, in fact, based on estimates and not on averages gleaned from the questionnaires. The transparent improbability of a Fourth Year student not paying his Medical Council of Canada fee, of a Third Year student having no hair-cuts, of a Second Year student not paying for any recreation and of a First Year student buying no books, and, for any of them, justifying \$500 for "incidentals", has made necessary a composite rather than a statistical treatment of the material from the questionnaires. Nonetheless it is felt that Table III is a realistic picture of the expenses of a Dalhousie medical student at the present time.

The stated income versus expenses balance sheets of 76 single students, residents of the Atlantic Provinces not living at home during the academic year, ranged from \$1,308 to \$3,835. A more useful picture is given by the "semi-interquartile range" (meaning the range of the middle 50% of the items in the sample) which was \$1,750 to \$2,115. The *median* stated amount was \$1,915.

The estimated annual expenditure (Table III) of the students in this group was \$1,775 (average of the four years). To this might have been added up to \$125 for travel to and from home and \$40 fraternity fees (75% of this group belong to one of the two medical fraternities with chapters here). This would give a reasonable total of \$1,940, which agrees well with the stated annual expenses of \$1,915.

TABLE III.

Estimated Expenses of 76 single students for 9 months (1961-62).

(Residents of the Atlantic Provinces, not living at home).

Medical Year	I	II	III	IV
Fees, University (a)	\$ 565	\$ 560	\$ 555	\$ 550
Other fees (b)	10	10	10	60
Books	120	85	60	120
Supplies and equipment	25	150	25	25
Room and board (c)	630	630	630	560
				(8 months)
Recreation, clothing, etc. (d)	430	430	430	430
Totals	\$1,780	\$1,865	\$1,710	\$1,745

(a) Includes tuition, laboratory fees, examination and diploma fees, microscope rental, student health service, library, athletic, student council and student medical society fees.

(b) Provincial medical boards, Medical Council of Canada fees.

(c) The average from questionnaires was \$629. Our two medical fraternities charged \$630 in 1961-62; the University residence \$720.

(d) This figure is based on the averages from the questionnaires as follows: recreation \$216; haircuts, etc. \$20.50; laundry and dry cleaning \$36.10; clothing and footwear \$120.50; medical and dental expenses \$26.00; charity and church \$13.50.

TABLE IV.

Sources of Income — 76 Single Students

(Residents of the Atlantic Provinces, not living at home)

	Amount (\$)	Percent-age (%)	No. of Students
Scholarships, prizes, bursaries	4,600	3.1	15/76
Subsidization with an after graduation service requirement in lieu of repayment (Armed Services, Newfoundland Gov't.)	19,645	13.1	15/76
Loans (a)	27,180	18.1	31/76
Support (non-loan) from parents, others	47,275	31.4	49/76
Student earnings (b)	48,745	32.4	70/76
Deficit	2,810	1.9	14/76
Totals	\$150,225	100.0%	

(a) Loans from parents	\$12,650 (17)*	(b) Summer earnings	\$37,270 (68)
Loans from college	1,225 (6)	School year earnings	5,065 (15)
Commercial loans	6,450 (21)	Savings, etc.	6,410 (10)
Prov. Gov't loans	4,335 (12)		
Other loans	2,520 (5)		

Totals..... \$27,180

\$48,745

*Figures in parentheses refer to number of students responding to that item.

TABLE V.
Sources of Income — 44 Married Students
(Both Residents and non-Residents of the Atlantic Provinces)

	Amount (\$)	Percent- age (%)	No. of Students
Scholarships, prizes, bursaries	1,500	0.8	6/44
Subsidization with a service requirement after graduation in lieu of repayment. (Armed Services, Newfoundland Gov't.)	30,865	15.7	15/44
Loans (a)	24,300	12.3	19/44
Support (non-loan) from parents, others.	40,941	20.8	26/44
Wife's earnings.	61,502	31.3	26/44
Student's earnings (b)	31,440	16.0	35/44
Deficit.	6,190	3.1	11/44
Totals	\$196, 738	100.0%	
(a) Loans from parents, etc. \$ 5,840 (4)			
Loans from college 950 (3)			
Commercial loans 10,960 (11)			
Prov. Gov't loans 1,200 (4)			
Other loans 5,350 (7)			
	<u>\$24,300</u>		
(b) Previous summer's earnings \$17,865 (25)			
School year earnings 2,815 (11)			
Savings and invest- ments 10,760 (11)			
			<u>\$31,440</u>

It may be thought surprising that the range of the cost of a medical education is so great, 25% spending from \$1,308 to \$1,750 and 25% spending from \$2,115 to \$3,835. However, in most cases it obviously reflects the general economic status of the student. Parkinson must surely have a law to cover this, something to the effect that expenses expand to take care of available money. However, a personal view would be that a student with less than \$1,600 per academic year (including, of course, the value of any free room and board, or of any scholarships) is probably not deriving all the benefits from medical school that he should. On the other hand, anything in excess of \$2,300 indicates a very comfortable standard of living for a student.

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It should be pointed out that what is being discussed here is only the cost to the medical student and it is not out of place, I think, merely to remind him that the cost of medical education to the medical school is also a serious problem. At the present time, in Dalhousie, the direct cost to the Faculty of Medicine is about \$3,500 per student per year, of which the student supplies about 15%, governments 35%, the remaining 50% coming from endowed funds of the Faculty of Medicine.

Regarding sources of income clearly there is no one pattern which characterizes a medical student's efforts to finance his education except that nearly all in the single student group manage to acquire about one-third of what they need from their own earnings, mostly in the summer. For the married student his wife's earnings (in the majority of cases) constitute the largest single source although the average summer earnings of married students who listed this source are higher than those of their single confreres who worked, \$900 against \$700.

Finally, it is to be hoped that the information from the questionnaires, the only solid information of its type collected in recent years in Canada, will be made use of in future planning in the areas of recruitment into the profession and financing of the student's share of the costs of his medical education.

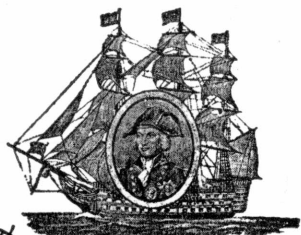
I am indebted to Barry J. Yoell for his able assistance during part of the summer of 1962, in analyzing some of the data.

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