



EXTERNAL REVIEW | DEPT. OF LABORATORY MEDICINE AND PATHOBIOLOGY Dean's Response

On behalf of the Faculty of Medicine, many thanks to the external reviewers—Prof. Jonathan Braun (Professor and Chair, Dept. of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine, University of California, Los Angeles), Prof. Subrata Chakrabarti (Professor and Chair, Dept. of Pathology, Western University), and Prof. Victor A. Tron (Professor and Head, Dept. of Pathology and Molecular Medicine, Queen's University). Their expert review and report are very much appreciated and serve to guide the future strategic directions of the Department of Laboratory Medicine and Pathobiology (LMP). May I also thank the administrative staff of LMP and all those who contributed to the preparation of the exemplary self-study report that provided a comprehensive and detailed analysis of the academic activities and contributions of LMP. Congratulations and thanks to the Chair, Professor Richard Hegele, for his visionary and strategic leadership. The following responses focus on the key issues raised by the reviewers. Professor Hegele has provided a detailed response and I am pleased to support his recommendations.

1. EDUCATION

The undergraduate (BSc) Life Sciences Program is outstanding and reflects the longstanding commitment of the Director, Professor Doug Templeton, to excellence and innovation. Expanding this program to enroll students will confer advantages and I am in agreement with the reviewers and Professor Hegele about this recommendation.

The high quality of graduate education in LMP is indisputable. The Department has made major effort to sustain and increase enrolments. The reviewers comment on, and Professor Hegele endorses, the opportunity to engage more directly graduate faculty members in academic processes, procedures and, I would add, the strategic directions of the graduate programs. Professor Hegele emphasizes the importance of assuming more leadership in translational research and graduate education. LMP is poised to lead in the translation of knowledge into clinical activities that will improve efficiency and cost effectiveness of laboratory and pathology data utilization in medical practice.

All of our Departments are struggling with the lack of government funding for international graduate students when research-intensive Canadian universities outside of Ontario are building their reputation by competitively attracting these students. Our Faculty would strongly support the University of Toronto advocating to change this position of the Ontario government on providing BIU funding for international graduate students.

The Faculty of Medicine strongly recommends that all Departments accumulate a moderate carry-forward contingency in operating revenues for strategic investments that could include bridge funding for stipends of graduate students whose supervisors experience a hiatus in research grant support. The approach outlined by Professor Hegele to form a committee of peers to assess bridge funding requests is strongly endorsed.

The Undergraduate Medical Education program is undergoing significant revision to the curriculum and LMP has the opportunity to contribute to new offerings as indicated by Professor Hegele. Increasing elective opportunities as recommended by the reviewers would be very welcome. The important role that laboratory medicine and pathology plays in developing relevant curricula in the era of personalized medicine cannot be overstated. Professor Hegele accurately states that the technological advances in precision diagnostics herald broadened disciplinary scope for LMP and it should be at the forefront of education innovation for new and practicing health professionals. The LMP Digital Laboratory Medicine Library represents a major step forward in this education mission.

Continuing education is a critical responsibility for LMP. Improved health-care outcomes and reduced laboratory diagnostic expense depends in part on the engagement of our Department of LMP in helping pathologists and laboratory medicine specialists to keep up to date and practicing at the highest standards.

Postgraduate training in LMP is recognized by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada to be exemplary. The availability of autopsy resources for education of residents in Anatomical Pathology should be addressed by the opening of the Ontario Forensic Services and Coroner's Complex as indicated by Professor Hegele.

2. RESEARCH

Federal research funding is a source of concern across all of Canada, including the University of Toronto. Our Vice-Dean of Research, Professor Alison Buchan, is working diligently with all of our on-campus Department Chairs to strategize about how to approach the new CIHR grant application process and to prepare for bridge funding of investigators over the next few years.

The translational research agenda identified by LMP with the four areas of emphasis is strongly supported by the Faculty and aligns with the overall strategic directions we have articulated. Further, these approaches are complementary with other Department planning, including the Institute of Medical Sciences, as well as the affiliated hospital research institutes. The integration of hospital-based researchers, LMP physicians, and clinical laboratory scientists with campus-based tenured professors/faculty in rounds, seminars, and opportunities for supervision of graduate projects is critically important for enabling cohesion and strategic collaboration within the Department.

3. RELATIONSHIPS

The reviewers comment that the faculty, students, and administrative staff are very positive about their experience in LMP. This is a credit to the academic and administrative leadership of the Department. They also comment about some of the challenges experienced by the clinical faculty and scientists in their hospitals and research institutes. Although the exact issues are not articulated by the reviewers, Professor Hegele has indicated that city-wide rounds and

seminars—including the opportunity for interactive videoconferencing—have been established to better network the academic activities of LMP faculty members among their many hospitals and research institutes. The role of the head of the division at each of the hospitals should include keeping the Department Chair up-to-date on hospital-based issues that involve LMP faculty so that Professor Hegele can assist in problem-solving to address challenges as they arise.

The development of a new academic alternative payment plan (APP) for pathology medical groups and laboratory specialties across the province of Ontario would be most welcome. Professor Hegele and the other department chairs of pathology in the province have the opportunity to establish a strategy for negotiation with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) and Ontario Medical Association. The current payment plan, negotiated many years ago and overdue for re-negotiation, applies to all pathologists across the province—in both academic and non-academic institutions. The Department of LMP at the University of Toronto, and other similar university departments in Ontario, require an alternative funding model with support from the MOHLTC that will enable academic pathologists and laboratory specialists to engage in teaching and research as part of their careers. Over the next year, Professor Hegele and the leaders of his Department will be working closely with our affiliated hospital leads to negotiate a specific academic APP for the faculty members in LMP who are appointed under the “University of Toronto Policy for Clinical Faculty.” This will go a long way to improving the status and remuneration of LMP faculty who are employed by the affiliated hospitals.

4. LONG-RANGE PLANNING AND CHALLENGES

Professor Hegele will be leading a renewal of the strategic plan for LMP early in his second term as Chair. He has correctly indicated that Canada looks to this Department to set the standard for education and research in this field. One opportunity for strategic clustering of LMP faculty engaged in complementary research both on and off campus will be identifying key themes complementary to those in other basic science and clinical Departments. This may give rise to opportunities for establishing innovative networks of interdisciplinary research led by LMP faculty. Translational research focused on new diagnostics using biomarkers may be an example. Benchmarking academic performance of the Department will be a key driver for future success. Fundraising, particularly for graduate studentships and salary support for faculty, should be a prominent goal for the department.

In summary, this is a very positive review and the Department of LMP has the opportunity to build on its success to achieve a more prominent international ranking over the next 5 years.



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