

To: Bursary Committee, Indigenous Physicians Association of Canada

My name is Jennifer Jocko, and I am a full status member of the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan. Presently, I am nearing successful completion of my first year in the Undergraduate Medical Program at McMaster University in Hamilton. I have been meeting or exceeding all academic and clinical requirements of the program.

My interest in helping people saw me follow in the steps of several members of my family, and I earned my Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Laurentian University at the age of twenty one. While in university, I worked summers and weekends at the Algonquin Nursing Home in Mattawa as a health care aide.

As an RN, I worked part time at both the Mattawa General Hospital and Algonquin Nursing Home, as a general duty nurse. My experience in Mattawa, served me well when I moved into a full time nursing position in the emergency department at North Bay General Hospital. I spent several years there, with the last four as charge nurse. Nipissing University also hired me as a clinical instructor for the last two years, while I continued to work full time in the emergency department. Teaching the second year students was a great adjunct to my continued quest for personal growth and knowledge. Working in the ER also allowed me to maintain my status as an Advanced Cardiac Life Support Instructor, which I also continue to hold currently.

Early in my career as a nurse I was encouraged by several physicians and family members to pursue my ultimate goal of becoming a doctor. My goal of admission to a recognized Canadian medical school proved successful on my fifth attempt. I was offered a spot at McMaster on what was going to be my last attempt, and was wait-listed at NOSM. I chose to attend McMaster because of its well established and renowned program, as well as their accelerated learning three year program.

Early in the start of this program, my peers identified me as a leader and encouraged me to pursue the role of Class President. However, given the existing demands on my time, I was nominated and elected Vice-President Internal Affairs. I have found solace in spending quiet time in the Native Health Sciences Office. I am involved with the Aboriginal Health Interest Group, and attend their lecture series. I also sit on the executive of the Emergency Medicine Interest Group and a member of the Family Medicine and Rural Medicine Interest Group.

With my husband and young family staying behind in Mattawa, the family stress has been enormous, but we have made it through intact. Adding to the stress, was the fact that my husband recently lost his full time employment in the forestry sector, as have many people in Northern Ontario.

My husband Brad and our two children, Logan, nine years old and Selena seven, will join me in Hamilton for my second year. This turn of events has added further financial hardship. We are now faced with the likely possibility of attempting to sell/rent our home in an economically depressed, one industry town. Despite all these challenges, and trying to maintain a semblance of normalcy for our children, we as a family are more committed than ever to my studies and goal of becoming a physician. The time we have had apart has also made us realize that we are a family that functions better together.

As a professional who has excelled in the health care field prior to medical school, I was faced with several realities. The majority of First Nation communities, mine included, focus on young high school graduates from their community when it comes to post secondary funding. Most of

the programs these students enroll in have low tuition fees. Despite having demonstrated excellence in attaining our degrees, excellent employment track records, we as mature students, are forced to compete with these young people for a finite and inadequate level of funding. To further add to this dilemma, we are ineligible for most student bursaries for aboriginal medical students, which are open only to us in our second year.

There is also limited aboriginal student academic support from the university. I have been fortunate to have met Dr. Karen Hill, Class of 2005, who has since become the coordinator of the Aboriginal Health Sciences Department. She has become my mentor and I participate in her Aboriginal Health Elective.

We, as Indigenous students from across Canada have to come to the realization that we must be proactive in making ourselves available to our indigenous youth, as role models and mentors. My first step will be assisting Dr. Karen Hill in an Aboriginal Student Information Day tentatively slated for May 10, 2007 at McMaster University. The target audience will be aboriginal students, high school and mature students, considering careers in health care and more specifically medicine. Drawing on my own experiences I hope to be able to convey the message and importance of setting goals, working hard, and never giving up, despite all the financial and personal challenges. This is all much needed information which I wished had been made available to me in my youth. More importantly, the face to face opportunity for these young people to interact with Indigenous medical students from their own background should have a very profound impact on these students.

In the final analysis, reaching the ultimate goal of becoming an Indigenous physician will allow me to help so many more of our people in the culturally sensitive manner in which they so deserve, as well as adding a voice, locally and federally, to those less heard, First Nations.

Thank you for your kind consideration of this funding request.

Sincerely,

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