

Social accountability of medical schools
Breakout session, Thursday, September 11, 2003
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WHO defines social accountability of medical schools as *“the obligation to direct their education, research and service activities towards addressing the priority health concerns of the community, region, and/or nation they have a mandate to serve. The priority health concerns are to be identified jointly by governments, health care organizations, health professionals and the public.”* The sixteen medical schools in Canada have established a common vision of social accountability and are embarking on a series of collaborative activities to better meet the needs of the Canadian population in partnership with federal, provincial and territorial governments, national, regional and local health organizations and community organizations. In the U.S., medical schools acknowledge that a social contract does exist between medical schools and the public, however in a conceptual sense, the terms of the contract are probably not as well developed in the United States as they are in Canada. This reflects differences between the two countries in certain cultural attitudes and in the role of government(s) in medicine. As a group, U.S. medical schools believe that their primary responsibility is to conduct activities that contribute to improvements in the nation’s health, but they also believe that the specific nature of the activities to be conducted should be determined by the schools themselves. A survey of medical school deans conducted in 1997 revealed that there was no consensus about the most important stakeholders that medical schools should engage in developing their programmatic agenda.

Participants in this session will develop an understanding of the role of medical schools in identifying and meeting the human resource needs of the community and in enhancing the quality of the health care system. The need for medical schools to be explicit in expounding their social accountability will be explored and ideas generated for encouraging the adoption of this concept.