

## New at Mac

# The McMaster Health Forum



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**A**s a member of the editorial board in the McMaster Meducator, I act as a liaison between undergraduate writers and post-graduate editors as an article moves through the editing process prior to publication. As of September this year, I also became the Meducator representative on the McMaster Health Forum. The Health Forum's Student Subcommittee provides students with the opportunity to express their opinions regarding health policy on all levels, ranging from global to local communities, such as here on campus. Being a part of the Health Forum as a second-year Biochemistry student and a member of the McMaster Meducator, I have thus far been able to expand my knowledge and familiarity with many diverse aspects of health care. I am a Co-Chair of the Student Subcommittee, along with MSU president Vishal Tiwari. Together, we lead the committee that represents the student body. This means that we organize Health Forum events that incorporate student involvement, chair meetings with other representatives from student organizations, and try to bring forth the opinions of McMaster students wherever to the Health Forum dialogue.

Joining this committee as a representative of a student group is a significant responsibility as the Health Forum requires a marked amount of time and energy. However, this experience also provides the opportunity to explore many interesting areas of health care provision that students often overlook. We are not often exposed to issues surrounding health policy and health care accessibility in resource-limited settings that currently affect millions of people around the world, and the Health Forum has been a fantastic way for me to become much more familiar with such

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topics. It has also sparked my personal interest in related areas. Furthermore, the Health Forum does not only represent and target its messages towards Science or Health Sciences students. Students not involved in science courses are also encouraged to partake in the forum dialogue as active and engaged citizens by attending presentations and events so that they too can be aware of the personal and global implications of health policy.

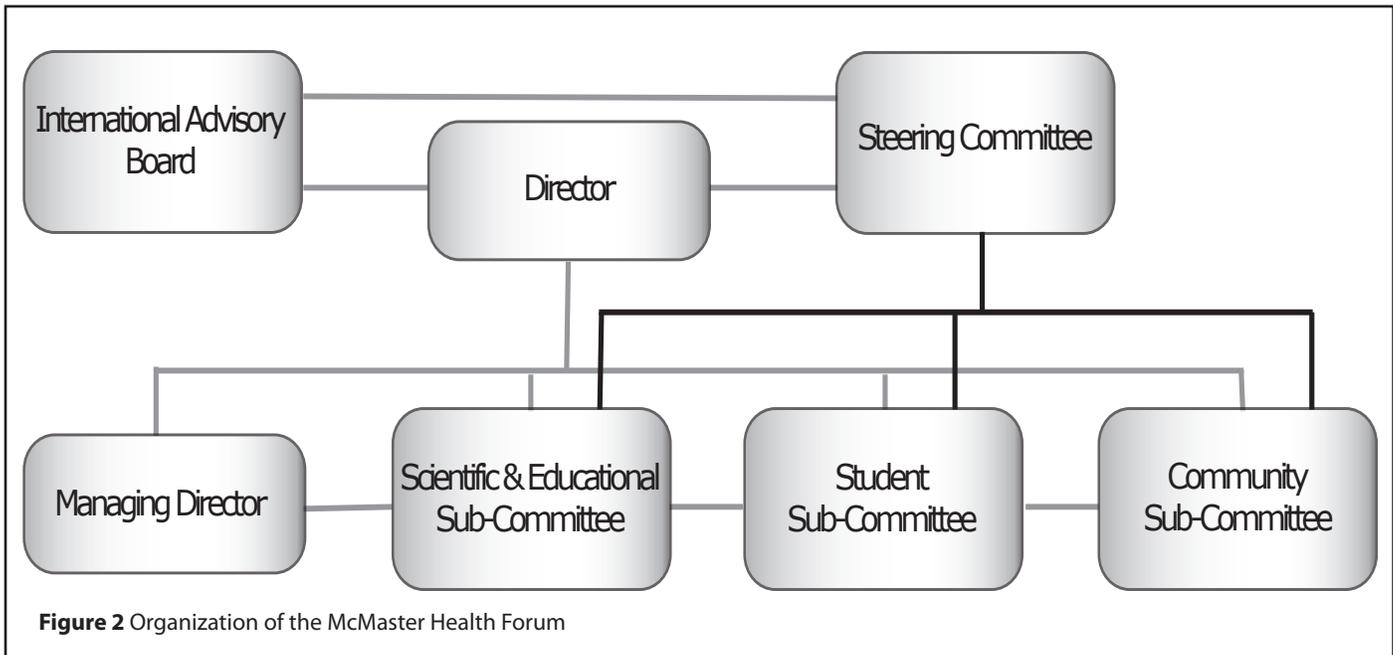
The McMaster Health Forum provides a platform for discussion among public health figures at the international,

provincial and regional levels, as well as among McMaster students, faculty, and Forum fellows. Forum events are meant to encourage debate among its stakeholders with regards to current challenges in health care. The vision of the Forum is to “be a world-leading hub for improving health outcomes through collective problem solving.” Its mission is to use current evidence, informed and concerned citizens and influential thinkers to meet the challenges presented by health care needs around the world. Some examples of these challenges include pandemic preparedness, such as that which we are experiencing with regards to H1N1, as well as the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Forum events focus primarily on knowledge translation and the dissemination of ideas. The intention behind this sharing of information is to transform insight into action, with the ultimate goal of improving research and education, as well as promoting awareness. The topics of discussion at these events are decided based on pressing health dilemmas that need



**Figure 1** Dr. John Lavis



to be addressed at all levels of leadership. There are several types of events held: dialogues lead by faculty and students, stakeholder dialogues, citizen panels, and public talks. Student-led dialogues and debates allow students to interact with top-level health officials. These are focused on health challenges that concern individuals at the grass-roots level. An example of a past event was a faculty debate on the topic of healthcare expenditures. McMaster students are encouraged to take part in these events and to develop informed opinions about the state of health care globally.

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The Forum is composed of three subcommittees, a steering committee, advisory board, adjunct faculty, fellows, and staff. The three subcommittees consist of a Scientific and Education Subcommittee, a Community Subcommittee, and a Student Subcommittee. The Forum is under the direction of Dr. John Lavis, a professor in the Department of Clinical Epidemiology & Biostatistics, as well as an associate member of the Department

of Political Science. The Student Subcommittee, chaired by MSU president Vishal Tiwari and myself, is designed to represent the interests and opinions of students at McMaster. The remainder of the committee is comprised of students representing health-related groups on campus, including: McMaster Meducator, McMaster Graduate Students Association, McMaster Medical Student Society, Bachelor of Health Sciences Society, McMaster University Nursing Student Society (MUNSS), MacDebate Society, Health, Aging and Society Student Association, and McMaster Students for Health Innovation. Students wishing to represent their organizations within the Health Forum at this level should see the Health Forum website (below) for more information about who they can contact. Representatives that sit on the Student Subcommittee are all members of campus groups with interests in health issues.

The McMaster Health Forum will be hosting events in November that are open to students. For more information about how you can attend or participate, please keep an eye open for posters around campus and posted on LearnLink, as well as events on Facebook! Additionally, there will be an upcoming event in Winter/Spring 2010 regarding barriers to health care access. Students are encouraged to contribute their opinions regarding the access they have to health care in Canada, as well as the availability of health care in other nations and its comparative quality. More information about the McMaster Health Forum can be found at <http://healthforum.mcmaster.ca/index.php>. 