

# “That will be \$231, please”

## William Green



Although I'm 80 years old, I'm sympathetic to the financial problems facing today's medical students (*CMAJ* 2003;169[5]:457). Still, when I came across a bill covering my tuition fees during my first year at Queen's in 1940, I was reminded that obtaining a medical education has always involved a financial struggle.

My tuition fees that year totalled \$231, compared with more than \$14 000 today, but they told only part of the story about medical school expenses in 1940.

There were no men's residences at Queen's then, so we had to rely on the good landladies of Kingston. Rooms cost at least \$3 a week, and even then you had to share with 1 or 2 other students.

The meal problem was solved by \$5.50 meal tickets that bought 14 meals at the Student Union or the Silver Spoon on Princess Street. Thus, 11 bucks would cover 2 weeks' worth of meals. The Union was pretty good, but at the Silver Spoon the meal ticket bought any entree that cost 35 cents. Since only 2 items were ever available (shepherd's pie and chicken livers with one fried egg), this may account for my lifelong aversion to shepherd's pie.

The amusement budget was blown with a \$5 ticket that provided 20 evening skates at the Jock Harty arena. Honesty obliges me to admit that this and a few other expenses were defrayed by the odd \$5 bill my mother tucked in when she sent back my laundry.

My books and a microscope (used) added another \$100.

Because of the war, some costs were even reduced. The bill for Athletics dropped to \$3 a year from \$5 because the time normally devoted to sports and fitness was spent boot bashing the streets of Kingston as members of the Queen's University Contingent Canadian Officers Training Corps.

Taking into account all these expenses, it is easy to understand my fiscal problems. My father, at some sacrifice, had given me \$1000 to see me through first year. "That boy has to learn how to handle money," he said. I felt a considerable sense of shame that, because of my unavoidable expenses, all that I was able to return to him at the end of the year was \$300.

Things did get better as time went on, though I did totter on the brink of financial disaster at times. By now we were attending school year round because of the war, so there was no summer break in which to work.

However, at the beginning of our penultimate year we were given a choice. We could join the army as privates and continue our medical education, or we could be conscripted into the army as privates and continue our medical

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY FEES		Faculty of Medicine	
Name	GREEN, William George	Date	Sept 24/40
<b>First Year:</b>			
Sessional fee (including Registration, Tuition, Examinations, Library, Laboratory Fees and Degree Fee).			
One payment	\$200.00		200.00
First instalment	\$105.00		
Second instalment (on or before January )	\$100.00		
Student Interests (including Health Insurance, Athletics, Alma Mater Society, "Queen's Journal," Aesculapian Society and Union) \$ 21.00			
Athletics—regular fee \$5, reduced for 1940-41 to \$3.			21.00
<b>Second, Third, Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Years:</b>			
Sessional fee (as above and including Student Interests as above).			
One payment	\$245.00		
First instalment	\$125.00		
Second instalment (on or before January )	\$125.00		
<b>Laboratory Deposit (Show this receipt to the Curator in Chemistry in order to have a desk assigned)</b> \$ 10.00			
			10.00
<b>Special Charges:</b>			
Late registration (if accepted)	\$ 3.00		
Supplemental examination (in one subject)	\$ 10.00		
Each additional subject	\$ 2.00		
Pro tanto fee	\$ 10.00		
Purchase of microscope (in full or by instalments)	\$		
Degrees M.D., C.M. in absentia	\$ 10.00		
<b>TOTAL FEES</b>			<b>231.00</b>
<b>PRESENT PAYMENT</b>			<b>231.00</b>

NOTE: A student may not attend classes until his fees are paid. From Monday to Friday of Registration week fees are to be paid at the Bank of Montreal, King Street East, between the hours of 10 and 4; thereafter, with extra charge, in Room 112, Douglas Library. Each student in paying fees must present this charge sheet in duplicate. Both copies will be stamped; one will be held as a receipt.

Courtesy William G. Green

education. To a man (there were no women at Queen's medical school then), we volunteered. The pay of a private was \$1.30 a day. Since we didn't live in barracks, we also got a living-out allowance of \$1.70 a day. I had never had so much disposable income.

But beyond that, there was a shortage of junior interns at the KGH (WW II again), and some final-year students were pressed into service as ersatz junior interns. The scale was 2 students = 1 intern, and since interns were paid \$25 a month, some of us picked up an extra \$12.50. But since, as interns, we also lived in residence and ate in the hospital, this was gravy. By now, we were really ahead of the game.

The amounts of money involved in pursuing a medical education in the 1940s may seem paltry by today's standards, but everything is relative, isn't it?

William Green resides in Townsend, Ont.