

A Moveable Med School

Students denied admission
to U.S. medical schools
sometimes turn to foreign
institutions for training.
But can a Caribbean
med school operate
in Cincinnati?

BY SUSAN V. LAWRENCE

One of the newest of the Caribbean medical schools that have sprung up to cater to U.S. students unable to gain admission to schools here is still operating—in Cincinnati, Ohio—despite more than six months of legal and administrative battles with Ohio educational authorities.

The American University of the Caribbean School of Medicine admitted its second class of students in January, bringing its enrollment to 210, and AUC president Paul S. Tien says applications are now being reviewed for a third class, due to arrive in May—also in Cincinnati. Tien, 50, is a China-born electrical engineer who claims to have a Ph.D. in educational administration from the Union Graduate School. He formerly headed Belmont Technical College in St. Clairsville, Ohio, a two-year state-supported school.

Although Ohio authorities have been arguing since before AUC opened that it cannot hold classes within the state without being certified by one of Ohio's two educational boards, the school claims it is exempt from state regulations because it is a foreign institution, incorporated on the tiny British dependency of Montserrat in the West Indies, and is only in Ohio temporarily. Emphasizing its point, AUC went to court last August asking for a temporary restraining order against the Ohio Board of Regents and Ohio State Board of School and College Registration. The Ohio attorney general responded with a request for a temporary injunction to prohibit AUC from holding classes.

At this writing, neither of those motions has been acted on. In mid-December, Judge William S. Mathews of the Hamilton County Court of Common Pleas suspended the legal proceedings until the Board of School and College Registration reconsidered AUC's request for a certificate of registration, which it had denied on Sept. 8. An administrative hearing on the appeal of that decision has been scheduled, and the Board may reach a decision in April at the earliest, according to its

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executive secretary Frank N. Albanese.

The legal proceedings, according to lawyers involved in them, could well take years to resolve—and further legal complications are a certainty with the addition of a separate lawsuit involving AUC. This one was filed Feb. 1 by two former AUC students who charge the school with fraudulent misrepresentation in several areas and who want their money back. They also ask for \$100,000 in punitive damages and, "for the class of all students, former students, and future students of AUC, a permanent injunction prohibiting defendants from soliciting students and promoting AUC in a false and fraudulent manner, and compensatory damages of \$1,500,000," among other things. That suit, too, could take years to resolve, says the students' lawyer, Joseph E. Conley Jr., of Cincinnati.

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Tien said in February that he wasn't worried about the students' lawsuit. "In any school, they cannot keep everybody happy. Even Harvard University can't." Besides, those students are merely "taking advantage of our situation, trying to pressure us to give their money back ... because we are involved in the legal battle with the state." As for his problems with the state of Ohio, Tien said: "I think right now everything's quieted down, because I think everybody gradually understand [the] intent [of] our school. We're not fraudulent to anybody, we're sincere, we have sincere plan ... to promote high-quality education in the medical field. I don't predict any more harassment."

Besides, the AUC's stated plans call for the school to leave the country in August of this year, although, according to Tien, the move may be delayed until December.

He says the school had to open in Ohio instead of in Montserrat because housing arrangements could not be made for students last summer.

In mid-February of this year construction of facilities on Montserrat had not yet begun, but Tien said he was confident that the school could move to Montserrat by December 1979, if not by August. Bids for construction of dormitories, a kitchen and a cafeteria were let early in February, but the lowest bidder could not guarantee completion before May 1980 so no bids were formally accepted. "Now, we have to look for some other quick alternatives. Maybe prefabricated buildings. We're thinking we're going to contact more builders, in prefabricated buildings," he said. And if worse comes to worst, students could be housed in metal industrial shells on Montserrat temporarily, he added.

In the meantime, AUC's 210 students pursue their studies in gross and microscopic anatomy, biochemistry, embryology, physiology, histology and neural science. The AUC's original faculty of three has been increased by six this semester. Their course loads, Tien says, average 15 to 16 hours per week.

The students use the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine's library, and use microscopes purchased by AUC. However, last semester they had no cadavers to dissect in anatomy labs because the school is not accredited in Ohio and thus cannot receive cadavers under state law. Instead, students have been using two "plastic cadavers" and watching "movie films" in class, a situation that most U.S. medical school teachers consider less than optimal. According to Roger C. Crafts of the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine, for example, an anatomy class without dissection of cadavers "would be a very inferior affair."

Tien said in mid-February this situation may be remedied soon, by arrangements being made between the AUC and a "research laboratory with cadavers that our students can utilize." The institution, which he did not identify, is located "in the Cincinnati area."

Last December, an organization called the NorthKent Research Institute, Inc., with a Newport, Ky., address and post office box, was incorporated in the state of Kentucky. Its president is AUC professor Verne L. Van Breemen; its vice-president is AUC student and son of the president, Yife Tien; its secretary-treasurer is Annette Hess, administrative assistant to Paul Tien. On Feb. 12, Kentucky officials issued transit permits for five cadavers shipped from New York to the NorthKent Research Institute. The permits were requested, according to Kentucky's Registrar of Vital Statistics, by AUC president Tien, and the address given for transporting the cadavers was in Florence, Ky. Both Newport and Florence are located just across the river from Cincinnati.

Van Breemen (histology professor at AUC) asked for cadavers from the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine last fall but was turned down because AUC is not accredited in Ohio, Crafts said. Later, anatomy professors at the University of Kentucky College of Medicine and the Uni-

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versity of Louisville (Ky.) School of Medicine told this reporter they were asked for cadavers by Van Breemen, representing NorthKent. The requests were turned down because he did not supply enough information about the institute.

Whether or not students will be performing actual dissections was not made clear by Tien, who said it was possible that they would simply watch demonstrations. In his view, use of plastic models, films and demonstrations would give the students adequate experience. "I think, mainly, they will learn more in the hospitals later on, when they start their clinical studies," he said. The AUC curriculum includes four semesters of basic sciences and four semesters of clinical studies. In a brochure sent out last spring, AUC said clinical studies would be offered in Caribbean and U.S. hospitals; a newer version of that brochure says clinical studies will be offered in "affiliated hospitals in the greater Caribbean area." No hospitals are yet affiliated with AUC, Tien admits, although the school plans to use a 70-bed hospital on Montserrat and hospitals on other Caribbean islands for the first three semesters of study, "under close faculty supervision." Hospital arrangements are to be made, he said, by a dean for clinical studies who has not yet been hired.

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In February, Tien advertised in SCIENCE and in the Chronicle of Higher Education for a dean of clinical studies, a dean of medical affairs, and for teachers of neuro-anatomy, gross anatomy, physiology, pharmacology and pathology. The dean for clinical studies, Tien said, should be "on board by August 1," in plenty of time to make arrangements for students' hospital work. AUC students are now only in their first and second semesters. Although some AUC students say the school has students doing clinical studies in U.S. hospitals now, and the new AUC brochure includes a section on admitting transfer students with advanced standing, Tien said no students with advanced enrollment are currently enrolled at the school.

Asked about the students at AUC, he said about 90 percent are American and about 10 percent from other countries, although all of those have permanent resident status. "We don't have the actual foreigners, that is directly enrolled from foreign countries...because right now we are not in the status to enroll [them]." When the school gets to Montserrat, he said, it will recruit students from other parts of the world.

At the present time, the AUC students' ages range from 22 years of age to 62 and include a number with advanced degrees. All have bachelors' degrees at a minimum, Tien said.

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inability to attend U.S. schools, and several have told this reporter that it is unfair to criticize the AUC or to compare it to U.S. schools, because it offers them a better deal than do other foreign medical schools.

Besides, said one, the quality of instruction doesn't really matter much in the first

two years of medical school. In his view, what matters is studying the textbooks and learning enough from them to pass the first part of the national examination given by the National Board of Medical Examiners. This examination is required for transfer to a U.S. school. At AUC, says the student, he can study the books, and for him and some other students that is enough.

Legal documents filed by AUC in Hamilton County Court state that the school "will not confer degrees, diplomas or other written evidences of proficiency or achievement during the period that it shall conduct classes in the state of Ohio; nor shall it at any time thereafter confer degrees, diplomas or other written evidences of proficiency or achievement within the state of Ohio." That means students cannot now obtain transcripts of their work. But, says Tien, they will be able to when the school moves to Montserrat. "If they want to transfer to the American medical schools, we will issue the transcripts in Montserrat," he said.

In the past, there have been more hospital and residency positions open than students to fill them, resulting in the influx of foreign-trained physicians that HEW is now seeking to curb.

Whether or not U.S. medical schools will be accepting many transfer students in the future, now that the Department of Health, Education and Welfare's program to encourage the acceptance of transfer students has ended and the government is encouraging medical schools to cut their enrollments, is another issue, of course. But AUC students place their hope in making good scores on the board examination and, failing that, in returning to the States for residency training — although that avenue, too, appears to be narrowing. According to data from the Association of American Medical Colleges, the number of students trained at U.S. medical schools is fast approaching the number of graduate training positions available. In the past, there have been more hospital and residency positions open than students to fill them, resulting in the influx of foreign-trained physicians that HEW is now seeking to curb.

A more immediate concern for AUC students is how to pay for their studies. Tuition at AUC is \$2,500 per semester, with three semesters each year. (In addition, the first class paid \$500 application fees not applied to their tuition. Now, according to the AUC's brochure, applicants must pay a \$50 application fee and a \$450 "in-scription fee," explained as a "non-refund-

able one-time fee paid only upon formal acceptance.")

The AUC is not approved for participation in the federal guaranteed student loan program, so students must find other sources for their tuition payments. Those who have obtained student loans in the past must also begin repaying them, or risk being charged with default. This, ac-

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ording to Tien, is "a big problem," but in his view it is not AUC's problem. The school applied for participation in the federal program last fall, and has not yet heard whether it will be accepted or rejected, Tien said in February.

However, Joseph M. Hardman of HEW's Office of Education said AUC applied in December and was then notified by his office that as long as the school was operating in Ohio it would be considered as a domestic institution and would have to comply with the requirements for U.S. schools.

In the meantime, applications are coming into that office from other Caribbean-based schools, and one pending from St. George's University School of Medicine in Grenada will have to be acted on soon. At the same time, HEW officials have become concerned about the number of schools springing up in the Caribbean catering to U.S. students, and the number of loans already being given to students studying medicine in foreign schools — for example, more than 2,300 students at the Autonomous University of Guadalajara School of Medicine have loans, and more than 1,000 at the Universidad Central del Este in the Dominican Republic have loans. In the past, no specific criteria for evaluating such foreign schools have been spelled out, but the whole procedure is undergoing a high-level review within HEW.

While loans are being provided for students at about 100 foreign medical schools, HEW officials say the United States is facing a possible surplus of physicians in the near future and wants U.S. schools to cut enrollments. In fact, under the administration's proposed budget for 1980, a major source of financial support for U.S. medical schools — capitation grants — would be eliminated entirely.

Asked whether those new U.S. policies might affect AUC students' chances for re-

turning to this country, Tien said he didn't think so. Besides, he said, "We set up the school not only to serve the market demand, but also to serve the people who are interested in that field, that career. Right now, so many young people ... are interested in a medical career. I think there is still a high demand for this type of education.... I don't think there is any decline at all of this kind of demand, of personal interest in this area."

Tien waxes enthusiastic about AUC's future in Montserrat, in particular his \$6 million building program. In court papers, Tien said the first phase of that program — student housing — was to be financed by "written, enforceable [sic] pledges in the total amount of approximately \$3 million" from "personal friends in Taiwan and various islands of the British West Indies." Money spent by AUC so far, he told this reporter, has come from donations and from student tuitions. He declined to identify those providing financial support for the school.

Tien also declined to identify the U.S. medical educators he said helped him design the curriculum because revealing their names might "jeopardize their jobs" at other universities here. He says he has had constant consulting help from medical educators, whose names he declined

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to release. He also declined to identify AUC's board of trustees, which he says is small and has no members who live in the United States. "Some live in the West Indies, and some in some Asian countries," he said, adding that the board of trustees will be expanded as soon as the school moves to Montserrat.

The recent change in government on Montserrat will have no effect on the agreements Tien signed with then chief minister P.A. Bramble, which include tax concessions and arrangements for leasing about 95 acres of land, Tien said. And the fact that AUC is not alone in the Caribbean does not disturb him.

The AUC, he says, has no connection and is not cooperating with any of the other offshore schools, although the government of Montserrat is encouraging AUC to work closely with the University of the West Indies School of Medicine. Tien hopes AUC will eventually become registered, through a new reciprocity law affecting British Commonwealth countries, with the British General Medical Council — although he did not know when that law might go into effect. □

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