Hey Team

I hope that you are having a safe and restful holiday break. Sorry to interrupt your holiday with an update, but, COVID doesn’t seem to have heard that we all needed a break.

I have included both the current clerks (class of 2022) and the 2023s. My hope is that the situation will be different (for the better) when the 2023s commence their clerkship in mid-January. Time will tell.

There are a number of updates.

Isolation Times
As of Monday, COVID isolation is now set at five days, instead of 10 (for those who are fully vaccinated). This will be helpful for those of you who do develop COVID; given the spread of omicron, this will likely be something that many of you will need to deal with in the coming weeks. We’ll work through things with you as the need arises. Please let me know if you are ill or test positive (and please cc both Sibyl (stai@ucalgary.ca) and Michelle (immune@ucalgary.ca)) so that we can keep track of cases and advise you on return to clerkship timing, make up time and exam deferrals, as required.

Health and Wellness at Work
Do not come to work if you have any symptoms of infectious illness. I know that it is tempting to come in if you are feeling a bit unwell. Please don’t do this. Each clerkship has a plan in place to allow you to miss a day or two on your rotations without requiring make up time. Even if you miss more than that, we will work with you to ensure that you can complete the make up time and still graduate with your class, ready to start residency on July 1.

Please ensure that you complete the daily AHS ‘fit for work’ testing each day. I know many of us (I will admit to being guilty of this) have slacked off on this over the last few months. Again, while I don’t foresee any move to take clerks out of the clinical environment, everything we can do that demonstrates that we are being good team players could help if those discussions were to occur. https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page17076.aspx is the site to start with.

These are further recommendations from AHS to reduce risk and spread:

The actions we take now can help slow the spread of Omicron:

- Stay home and away from others if you are sick.
- Reduce your in-person social interactions and close contacts by 50 per cent.
- Abide by all current public health measures and travel advice.
- For healthcare workers, continue to use the COVID-19 online self-assessment tool to determine if you need to book a PCR test.
- Complete the COVID-19 Daily Fit for Work Screening before your shift.
- Get immunized – whatever dose you are eligible for and with the first available vaccine.

Masking and Goggling
At present, it is required that everyone must wear eye protection (goggles — not regular eyeglasses) and a procedure mask at all times except when in an office or room where there is more than two metres between individuals.

It is also now required that when you are in settings where you are caring for COVID positive/probable/possible patients (or units on outbreak) that you wear a properly fitted N95 mask. Masks should be available on units where they will be required. Please ensure that you have access to your fitting information to make sure that you are wearing the right mask.

In addition, all clinical and non-clinical health care workers are now expected to wear N95 respirators in settings where frequent or unexpected exposure to aerosol generated medical procedures (AGMP) is anticipated (for example, critical care units and emergency departments), where there is a high density of COVID-19 patients (such as COVID-19 units), or when there is evidence of unexplained transmission (such as COVID-19 outbreaks).

These are significant changes: previously, N95 masks were only required for situations where AGMPs were being performed on COVID positive/probable/possible patients.

Rotation Changes
You may be hearing from Clerkship Directors or administrators about changes to scheduled rotations. Please know that any decisions that are made to your program are carefully considered to find a balance between your learning and safety for you, your preceptors, other staff and patients. If changes occur, they will be communicated to you via your U of C email — so please be sure to check this regularly. At present, the only specific change I am aware of is that students starting on an Obs-Gyne rotation this coming week will not have the usual in person boot camp teaching sessions. I suspect that you will instead just plan to show up at your site on the first scheduled day, but the OG team will follow up for those learners with the specifics. Other rotations that may see some changes will be those that use ORs for clinical learning. At present, I am not aware of plans to shut down ORs as occurred during the delta wave, however, this could certainly happen. Finally, there will be outbreaks and watches, and in some situation, learners are prevented from attending patients on outbreak units — as we become aware of these, we’ll communicate to the class and work to find alternatives for displaced students.

Enjoy the rest of your holiday time. Stay safe and look after yourselves.

KB

Kevin Busche MD BSc FRCPC
Associate Professor
Department of Clinical Neurosciences