March 13, 2020

Boops Boops

As I am sure that you can understand, we have been very busy in UME trying to plan for how to maintain our education program in the midst of the COVID19 pandemic. I also hope you will understand that the landscape is changing hourly. Thanks to all of you who have emailed with questions who have acknowledge that we’re swamped!

In the midst of everything else going on, I was able to convene, with less than 24 hours notice, a gathering with our UME leaders and representatives from almost all of our clerkships. I’m incredibly proud of how much our team values your health and your learning.

We have made the decision to temporarily suspend all clinical work for all clinical clerks.

Each service will talk with their learners directly but this will take effect no later than Monday March 16 for all students. This gives the clerkships the weekend to plan schedules; if you are on call tonight or over the weekend, you should plan to be present for this.

This applies to all rotations: core or electives, at any site. You can let your preceptors know; this will also be communicated directly to all clerkships who will fan it out to preceptors. All schools where we have students doing electives will also be informed so that your preceptors will be notified.

I can assure you that this is not a decision that we have made lightly. This is supported broadly, both by the UME and the Dean’s Office.

We have taken into consideration both your safety and your learning. I do not want you in a position where you are at risk of becoming unwell. While that risk is not overwhelmingly high right now, every prediction that we have suggests that the risk is going to rapidly increase in the coming days and our decision is made with the goal of getting ahead of that curve. We want to remove people from the clinical environment who aren’t absolutely necessary. This is being forced on us to a degree; there are several clinical areas (emergency rooms, operative theatres) that either are already closed to learners or may be closing for learners imminently. You will
also likely be aware that many Canadian schools have cancelled all visiting electives; those that have not will likely do so in the near future. We are closing to visiting electives now.

From a learning point of view, it will become progressively more difficult for you to learn effectively in the clinical space. With all of the above closures/cancellations, we would have to move more learners into already full clinical areas. Not only does that dilute the learning, it increases safety risks. Furthermore, clinicians are going to be busier, leaving less time for teaching and the odds are very high that there will be fewer clinicians available as more become ill or are quarantined. Clinics will be moving to more virtual care or cancellations – again, reducing capacity.

What does this mean for you, as a member of our class of 2020? That’s a long answer. Please bear with me. First and foremost: you will be graduating on time. Our plans include getting you out of here with your MD as scheduled.

We are removing all clerks (both 2020 and 2021). The details are different for the two classes, hence separate communications.

While we are going to be continually reviewing and updating, our immediate plan is that 2020 students will likely not be returning to clinical services in the remaining four weeks of clerkship. You will not be required to have make up time for this. We’ll review this in two weeks, but realistically, I think you will be out for the remainder.

Please submit an ITER for your current rotation to your preceptor. We’ll consider those ITERs as final.

You will be expected to complete all content exams that are scheduled. At the present time, we are going to maintain our current schedule for exams. We will plan to do these on site as would be the normal case; we will have the capability to spread students out widely in the building to reduce the risk of being here in person. I realize it is a lot to ask to have you do exams with limited clinical exposure. For those of you with rotations like ER and Anesthesia remaining it will be writing a clinical knowledge exam without any specific clinical exposure. We recognize that we will have to take that into account when we are grading those exams and considering rewrites, reappraisals or other usual academic considerations.
We have asked each of the clinical clerkships to support you while you are ‘on’ a rotation, even though not attending in person. By that, I mean that the clerkships are working on developing resources that we can provide to you to continue learning. In addition, the clerkships will move to providing learning sessions on-line that they would normally provide in person (e.g. if there is an academic half-day in a clerkship, that teaching will still be provided, but online, rather than in person). Some clerkships may harness their faculty or residents who are quarantined to provide some online education as well. You will also have access to all of the learning resources provided through OSLER. You are expected to ‘attend’ any scheduled learning sessions and participate actively through the online session. Further details for schedules and format will be forthcoming from the individual clerkships to students.

As you are working through your studies, you can continue to complete your logbook to assist you in approaching that learning. Reading around the clinical presentations and discussing those in teaching sessions can ‘count’ towards completing the log book in this unique situation.

Those of you with deferred and rewrite exams should plan to complete those as scheduled.

Any clerks who have scheduled remedial clinical time are going to have their situations reviewed on a case-by-case basis by UME and SARC to make a decision about whether this will need to be completed or not.

Our tentative plan is that we will look at a short ‘feed forward’ email to the program directors of the programs that our students have matched to let them know about what rotations have been missed so that they can support you with your learning in residency (e.g. if you don’t do anesthesia and this is relevant to your post-grad program, they might want to give you a short rotation in anesthesia during your first year). I will note that at this point during clerkship, most of you are on rotations that may not directly impact your chosen residency. This will require further consideration.

If you are wanting to find other work to fill your remaining time, there are a few options (in addition to preparing for exams as outlined above). The Health Link system in Alberta is overwhelmed and has approached us looking for volunteers to work with them; this may include working on the phone lines, contact tracing or other general help. Our Associate Dean Dr. Naugler is working on getting this set up; we will forward more information as soon as it is available. Please consider signing up: this will be meaningful work to support our community. We have the idea that we might be able to call this an actual ‘elective’ but can’t confirm this.
You could look at doing some research work in this time; it may be difficult to find a preceptor to work with as a part of a formal research elective because of the pandemic pulling people away. Any research work cannot involve time in a clinical setting. Many labs will also be closed and so that will also be difficult. If there was work you could do at home (e.g. case reports) this would be an opportunity. If you are in a research elective that does not involve any clinical work or lab work – you can continue with this (but this will not be the case for many of you).

We will look at moving our MCC review into this block of time as well. That program will now have to be offered virtually. We have contacted the MCC to find out what their plan is for scheduled sittings for the MCC part 1 exam. We have not heard back yet. If we hear anything, we’ll let you know or they may contact you all directly.

Please continue to take care of yourselves and each other. We will get through this together.

While I am sure that will be many of you that want to discuss and debate some or all of the above, I suspect you will understand that my ability to communicate with you individually is going to be limited for the time-being. Please feel free to email me, but, I will not be replying to all emails. We will continue to work on refining our plans and will be communicating regularly by email to the classes as a whole. Please alert your colleagues to these emails (remembering that the details for 2020s and 2021s are a bit different).

Sincerely,

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