

Principles for Volunteer Activities of Dalhousie Faculty of Medicine Students During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Focus on Value and Safety

April 7, 2020

Preamble

All aspects of the normal function of Dalhousie University's Faculty of Medicine have been greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Likewise, healthcare and healthcare workers have been affected as we collectively plan to care for COVID-19 patients. Impact has already been felt in some sectors of the Maritime Provinces as ambulatory care has changed to virtual visits where possible, elective procedures have stopped, and staffing has become an issue in some areas due to self-isolation or quarantine requirements. Staff illness may soon pose a problem as well. Long-term care institutions have already been affected, for example.

During this time, medical education across all four years of the undergraduate medical education program has been altered. Curricula for first- and second-year students have changed to virtual instruction (lectures, exams, tutorials and skilled clinical sessions). Fourth-year medical students will complete their program requirements on-line in order to graduate as scheduled in May 2020. Due to the clinical nature of the third-year medicine clerkship, however, instruction for these students has been largely interrupted at Dalhousie as well as at all other medical schools across Canada.

Medical students have a valuable skill set that may be helpful in dealing with the pandemic on a voluntary basis. While clinical activities are interrupted, these volunteer activities may be of interest to third-year students in particular, but also possibly to first- and second-year students depending on the duration of the pandemic. If well selected, these activities may be educational and fulfilling for the students.

Given our societal role as the medical school of the Maritimes, Dalhousie's Faculty of Medicine values supporting the needs of our communities and region. Likewise, we highly value the safety of our students as they gain the experience that will prepare them as the physicians of tomorrow. Students should learn from these unprecedented times in healthcare, and volunteer experiences must be carefully considered to ensure both value and safety.

Although many students have demonstrated an interest in volunteer experiences, some students due to personal choice or circumstances may not be able to participate. Whether a student chooses to partake in volunteer experiences related to COVID-19 or not will have no impact on students' evaluation, progress, or any other aspect of medical school performance.

Principles around Volunteer Experiences for Students in the Faculty of Medicine

- 1. There shall be no pressure or expectation from the Faculty of Medicine that students volunteer.**
- 2. Students are encouraged to consider participating in volunteer opportunities taking into account their personal choices and circumstances and recognizing that for very sound reasons many students will choose not to become involved in such pursuits.**
- 3. Students are encouraged to consider the skills they will utilize and the risk of exposure to COVID-19 when contemplating participating in volunteer activities.**
- 4. Volunteer activities should reflect, in part, the level of training and acquired skills of individual students with the recognition that students are citizen volunteers and there is no expectation of medical competence.**
- 5. Volunteer activities will not be evaluated, nor reported on the MSPR.**
- 6. Volunteer activities can involve different skills and different levels of risk to exposure to COVID-19. In order to assist students in making an informed choice about what volunteer activities they wish to participate in, sponsoring agencies will be asked to provide students with written information on the risk of COVID-19 infection, strategies to minimize risk and other related issues. Volunteer activities may be discussed with a senior Faculty advisor¹, who can support students in getting information from sponsoring agencies. That said, this advisory role is not to provide oversight or approval of volunteer experiences. It is to allow students to be well informed about the value and risks of the experiences before deciding if they wish to participate.**
- 7. Training and other protective measures are up to the organization requesting volunteers.**
- 8. Liability would be held by the organization, not Dalhousie University.**
 - 1. For DMNS, the Faculty Advisor will be Dr. Darrell White, Senior Associate Dean. Dr. Shelly McNeil, Head of the Division of Infectious Disease, Department Dalhousie University and Dr. Gaynor Watson-Creed, Deputy Director of Public Health, Province of Nova Scotia have agreed to provide support to the Faculty Advisor role. For DMNB, the Faculty Advisor will be Dr. Tony Reiman. Infectious diseases consultants in New Brunswick will support the DMNB Faculty advisor.**