

Joint Statement to all Ontario Medical Students in Final Year on Visiting Student Electives

Preamble:

A pressing unresolved issue facing medical schools and students in Ontario at this time relates to the availability of visiting electives for the 2021 graduating class. These electives are intended to allow students to augment areas of clinical interest and competency and to explore future career options.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have a profound impact on all aspects of patient care, education and how we conduct our personal lives aligned with the directives of public health and governments. The key issue at this time is not acceptance of the value of visiting electives, nor the ability to provide time within our schools. Rather, it is the ability of each school to provide opportunities for visiting students within the current clinical environment and the uncertainty of equity due to continually evolving public health directions.

Given what is understood and predicted about the behaviour of this pandemic, it seems highly unlikely that the considerations that precipitated the need to suspend our clerkships and are currently restricting our ability to expand clinical placement opportunities will improve or resolve in the 2020-21 academic year. Recent actions on travel restrictions for health care providers changing geographic or clinical care environments and the risk of sudden withdrawal in the fall of visiting electives could compromise graduation and match as the home school may not have capacity to accommodate students on short notice.

We are collectively writing to you with a decision to cancel visiting electives for the 2021 class of all Ontario schools. The decision was driven by consideration of the following: clinical teaching opportunities; student safety; anticipated volume of cases at most schools; faculty and resident availability for student clinical learning, and restriction of non-COVID care being provided at affiliated learning sites. It was amplified by the need to preserve critical under resourced supplies of PPE, and public health decisions restricting travel and mandating quarantine on arrival in a new care site.

In the absence of visiting electives, alternative mechanisms will be required to allow student alternative career exploration opportunities and linkages with potential destination postgraduate programs. Postgraduate programs will need to re-assess applications processes and will require time to implement them. All require time to adjust and prepare for an altered career exploration and application process.

The commitment to all students in Ontario faculties of Medicine to achieve curriculum outcomes and progress to PGME is strong and a key principle from all schools. Adaptation and innovation of elective medical student learning to fit in the new normal of COVID-19 requires us to rethink our processes and priorities.

Recommendation:

1. Visiting electives for the 2021 graduating class are not possible.
2. The UME Programs in Ontario commit to working within their schools and with our PGME colleagues to revamp the electives process and support a complementary postgraduate application process for this and future years. This is already underway with the movement to virtual interviews and harmonized MSPR documents.
3. We as leaders in the Ontario UME educational community commit our energy to positive change in meeting the learning needs of your class and those that follow.

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